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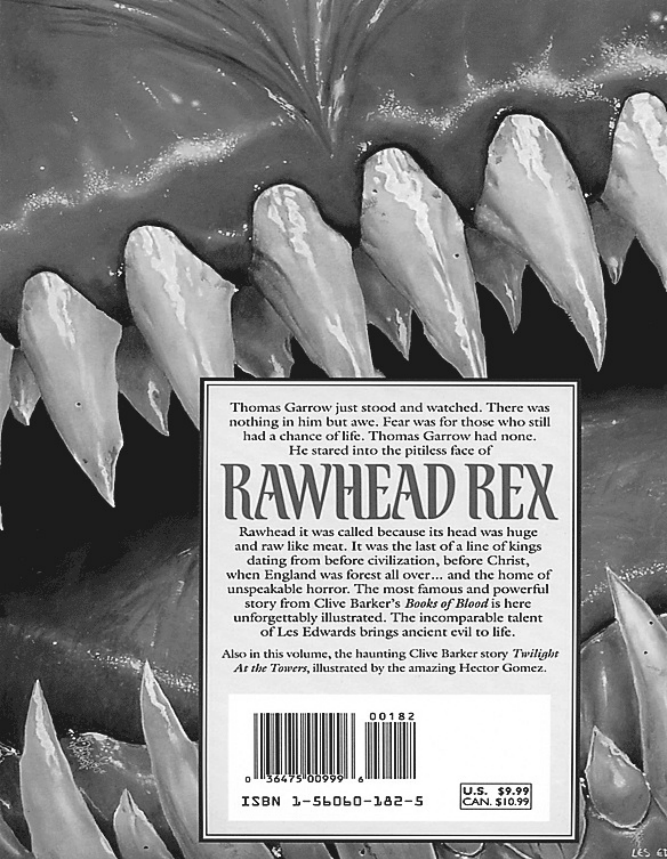
ECLIPSE
GRAPHIC NOVELS

CLIVE BARKER



RAWHEAD REX

Adapted by Steve Niles
Artists Les Edwards and Hector Gomez



Thomas Garrow just stood and watched. There was nothing in him but awe. Fear was for those who still had a chance of life. Thomas Garrow had none.

He stared into the pitiless face of

RAWHEAD REX

Rawhead it was called because its head was huge and raw like meat. It was the last of a line of kings dating from before civilization, before Christ, when England was forest all over... and the home of unspeakable horror. The most famous and powerful story from Clive Barker's *Books of Blood* is here unforgettably illustrated. The incomparable talent of Les Edwards brings ancient evil to life.

Also in this volume, the haunting Clive Barker story *Twilight At the Towers*, illustrated by the amazing Hector Gomez.



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CLIVE BARKER was born in Liverpool in 1952. He is the author of *The Books of Blood*, *The Damnation Game*, *Weaveworld*, *Cabal*, *The Great and Secret Show*, *The Hellbound Heart*, *Imajica* and *The Thief of Always*. In addition to his work as a novelist and short story writer, he is also an accomplished illustrator and writes, directs and produces for the stage and screen. His spectacular films the *Hellraiser* trilogy, *Nightbreed* and *Candyman* bring his unique and indelible vision of modern horror to celluloid and video life. Barker uses all aspects of popular culture to substantiate his extraordinary insight into the menacing present. Millions of readers and filmgoers have been captivated by Barker's prodigious talents; now graphic novel adaptations of his stories add a further dimension to his hold on the popular imagination. Clive Barker lives in Los Angeles, where he continues his love affair with the bizarre, the perverse and the terrifying.

INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM FOR CLIVE BARKER:

'Barker is so good I am almost tongue-tied. What Barker does makes the rest of us look like we've been asleep for the last ten years.'

STEPHEN KING

'A powerful and fascinating writer with a brilliant imagination.'

J.G. BALLARD

'Clive Barker has been an amazing writer from his first appearance, with great gifts of invention and commitment to his own vision stamped on every page.'

PETER STRAUB

BOOKS BY CLIVE BARKER

The Books of Blood (<i>six volumes</i>)	The Hellbound Heart
The Damnation Game	Imajica
Weaveworld	The Thief of Always
Cabal	Clive Barker Illustrator
The Great and Secret Show	

GRAPHIC STORIES BY CLIVE BARKER

The Yattering and Jack	Tapping the Vein (<i>five volumes</i>)
Dread	Son of Celluloid
Revelations	The Life of Death

THE ARTISTS

Les Edwards

was born in London in 1949 and went to Hornsey College of Art from 1968 – 1972. His paintings can be found on book covers in the UK and the USA, including covers for works of Ramsey Campbell, Robert E. Howard, Frank Herbert and many others. He has also worked on conceptual drawings for films, film posters, gamebox covers and advertising. His graphic novel debut was *Son of Celluloid*. He lives in Ilford, Essex, with his wife Valerie and two Siberian Huskies named Zera and Shadow.

Hector Gomez

was born in Argentina and now lives in Brazil. He has had two graphic novels published in Brazil, *Samsara* and *Amazing Muchachos*. He works as an illustrator for mainstream magazines and exhibits canvases at exhibitions. His work for Eclipse includes artwork for Clive Barker's *How Spoilers Bleed* and *New Murders in the Rue Morgue*. His covers for Malibu Comics include *Dollman*, *Rocket Ranger*, *Jungle Love* and *Paranoia*.

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OF ALL THE CONQUERING ARMIES THAT HAD TRAMPED THE STREETS OF ZEAL DOWN THE CENTURIES, IT WAS FINALLY THE MILD TREAD OF THE SUNDAY TRIPPER THAT BROUGHT THE VILLAGE TO ITS KNEES.

ZEAL HAD SUFFERED ROMAN LEGIONS AND THE NORMAN CONQUEST. IT HAD SURVIVED THE AGONIES OF CIVIL WAR, ALL WITHOUT LOSING ITS IDENTITY TO THE OCCUPYING FORCES.

BUT AFTER CENTURIES OF BOOT AND BLADE, IT WAS TO BE THE TOURISTS, THE NEW BARBARIANS, THAT BESTED ZEAL, THEIR WEAPONS COURTESY AND HARD CASH.

IT WAS IDEALLY SUITED FOR INVASION. FORTY MILES SOUTHEAST OF LONDON, AMONGST THE ORCHARDS AND HORFIELDS OF THE KENTISH WEALD, IT WAS FAR ENOUGH FROM THE CITY TO MAKE THE TRIP AN ADVENTURE, YET CLOSE ENOUGH TO BEAT A QUICK RETREAT IF THE WEATHER TURNED FOUL.



EVERY WEEKEND BETWEEN MAY AND OCTOBER, ZEAL WAS A WATERING HOLE FOR FARTCHED LONDONERS WHO SWARMED THROUGH THE VILLAGE ON EACH SUNDAY THAT PROMISED SUN.

FOR THEIR PART THE ZEALOTS WERENT UNBOLDY DISTRESSED BY THE SUNDAY TRIPPERS. AT LEAST THEY DIDNT SPILL BLOOD. BUT THEIR VERY LACK OF AGGRESSION MADE THE INVASION ALL THE MORE INSIDIOUS.

AT FIRST FEW, THEN MANY, BEGAN TO MAKE THEIR BIDS FOR LOTS, EMPTY BARN, AND DESERTED HOMES THAT LITTERED ZEAL AND ITS OUTSKIRTS.

THEY COULD BE SEEN EVERY FINE WEEKEND, STANDING IN THEIR NESTLES AND RUBBLE, PLANNING HOW TO HAVE A KITCHEN EXTENSION BUILT, AND WHERE TO INSTALL THE JACUZZI.



GRADUALLY THESE CITY-WEARY PEOPLE BEGAN TO WORK A GENTLE BUT PERMANENT CHANGE ON THE VILLAGE.



AND ALTHOUGH MANY OF THEM, ONCE BACK IN THE COMFORT OF KILBURN OR ST JOHN'S WOOD, CHOSE TO STAY THERE, EVERY YEAR ONE OR TWO OF THEM WOULD STRIKE UP A REASONABLE BARGAIN WITH ONE OF THE VILLAGERS AND BUY THEMSELVES AN ACRE OF THE GOOD LIFE.

SO, AS THE YEARS PASSED AND THE NATIVES OF ZEAL WERE PICKED OFF BY OLD AGE, THE CIVIL SAVAGES TOOK OVER IN THEIR STEAD. THE OCCUPATION WAS SUBTLE, BUT THE CHANGE WAS PLAIN TO THE KNOWING EYE.



IT WAS THERE IN THE NEWSPAPERS THE POST OFFICE HAD BEGUN TO STOCK. WHAT NATIVE OF ZEAL HAD EVER PURCHASED A COPY OF HARPER'S AND QUEEN MAGAZINE, OR LEAFED THROUGH THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT? IT WAS THERE, THAT CHANGE, IN THE BRIGHT NEW CARS THAT CROSSED THE ONE NARROW STREET, LAUGHINGLY CALLED THE HIGH ROAD, THAT WAS ZEAL'S BACKBONE.



IT WAS THERE TOO, IN THE BUZZ OF GOSSIP AT 'THE TALL MAN,' A SURE SIGN THAT THE AFFAIRS OF THE FOREIGNERS HAD BECOME FIT SUBJECT FOR DEBATE AND MOCKERY.



INDEED, AS TIME WENT BY, THE INVADERS FOUND A YET MORE PERSISTENT PLACE IN THE HEART OF ZEAL, AS THE PERENNIAL DEMONS OF THEIR HECTIC LIVES, CANCER AND HEART DISEASE, TOOK THEIR TOLL, FOLLOWING THEIR VICTIMS EVEN INTO THIS NEWFOUND LAND.



LIKE THE ROMANS BEFORE THEM, LIKE THE NORMANS, LIKE ALL INVADERS, THE COMRADES MADE THEIR PROFOUNDEST MARK UPON THIS USURPED TURF NOT BY BUILDING ON IT...

...BUT BY BEING BURIED UNDER IT.

IT WAS CLAMMY, THE MIDDLE OF THAT
SEPTEMBER. ZEAL'S LAST SEPTEMBER.

THOMAS BARROW, THE ONLY SON OF THE LATE THOMAS BARROW, WAS
SWEATING UP A HEALTHY THIRST AS HE DUG IN THE CORNER OF THE
THREE-ACRE FIELD. THERE'D BEEN A VIOLENT RAINSTORM THE
PREVIOUS DAY, AND THE EARTH WAS SODDEN. IT WAS HEAVY LABOR,
CLEARING STONES AND SORTING OUT THE DETRITUS OF OUT-OF-
DATE MACHINERY HIS FATHER, LAZY BASTARD, HAD LEFT TO
RUST WHERE IT LAY.

MUST HAVE BEEN SOME GOOD YEARS,
THOUGHT THOMAS, THAT HIS FATHER
COULD AFFORD TO LEAVE THE BEST
PART OF THREE ACRES UNPLOUGHED.
GOOD HEALTHY SOIL, TOO.

THIS WAS THE GARDEN OF ENGLAND AFTER ALL. LAND WAS MONEY. LEAVING
THREE ACRES FALLOW WAS A LUXURY NOBODY COULD AFFORD IN THESE
STRAITENED TIMES. BUT JESUS, IT WAS HARD WORK—THE KIND OF WORK
HIS FATHER HAD PUT HIM TO IN HIS YOUTH, AND HE'D HATED WITH A
VENGEANCE EVER SINCE.

STILL, IT HAD TO BE DONE.

AND THE DAY HAD BEGUN WELL, BUT
WHEN HE CAME BACK TO THE FIELD
AFTER A LIQUID LUNCH IN "THE
TALL MAN," THINGS BEGAN TO GO
WRONG. THE ENGINE HAD CUT OUT
FOR ONE, AND THEN, WHEN HE'D
ONLY BEEN BACK AT WORK A FEW
MINUTES, HE'D FOUND THE STONE.



IT WAS AN UNSPECTACULAR
LUMP OF STUFF.

JUST A FEW GROOVES IN ITS FACE THAT MIGHT
HAVE ONCE BEEN WORDS. A LOVE LETTER
PERHAPS. A "KILROY WAS HERE" MORE
LIKELY. A DATE AND NAME LIKELIEST OF ALL.
WHATEVER IT HAD ONCE BEEN, MONUMENT
OR MILESTONE, IT WAS IN THE WAY NOW.
HE'D HAVE TO DIG IT UP OR NEXT YEAR
HE'D LOSE A GOOD THREE YARDS OF
FLOUGHABLE LAND.



FOR SOME REASON THIS STRETCH OF GARROW LAND HAD
BEEN LEFT FALLOW FOR A GOOD MANY SEASONS, MAYBE
EVEN FOR GENERATIONS. IN FACT, THERE WAS A SUS-
PICION TICKLING THE BACK OF HIS SKULL THAT SOMEONE,
PROBABLY HIS FATHER, HAD SAID NO GRASS WOULD EVER
GROW IN THAT PARTICULAR SPOT.

BUT THAT WAS PLAIN NONSENSE. IF ANYTHING,
PLANT LIFE GREW THICKER AND RANKER IN THIS
FORGOTTEN THREE ACRES THAN IN ANY OTHER
PLOT IN THE DISTRICT.



IF HE COULD
JUST FIG OUT THAT
BLOODY STONE.

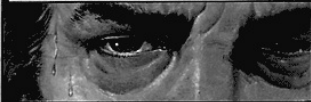
HE'D HALF-THOUGHT OF HIRING
ONE OF THE EARTH MOVERS
FROM THE BUILDING SITE AT
THE NORTH END OF THE VIL-
LAGE, BUT HIS PRIDE REGISTED
THE IDEA OF RUNNING FOR
HELP AT THE FIRST SIGN OF
A BLISTER.

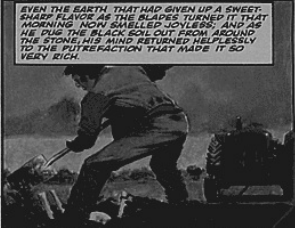


NOW, TWO AND A
HALF HOURS LATER,
HE WAS REGRETTING
HIS HASTE.

SO THERE WAS NO REASON
ON EARTH WHY HOPS SHOULDN'T
FLOURISH HERE. MAYBE EVEN
AN ORCHARD, THOUGH THAT TOOK
MORE PATIENCE AND LOVE THAN
THOMAS SUSPECTED HE POS-
SESSED. WHATEVER HE CHOSE
TO PLANT, IT WOULD SURELY
SPRING UP FROM SUCH RICH
GROUND WITH A RARE
ENTHUSIASM.

THE RIPENING WARMTH OF THE AFTERNOON HAD SOURED IN
THAT TIME, HAD BECOME STIFLING. OVER FROM THE DOWNS
CAME A STUTTERING ROLL OF THUNDER, AND THOMAS
COULD FEEL THE STATIC CRAWLING AT THE NAPE OF HIS
NECK, MAKING THE SHORT HAIRS THERE STAND UP.





EVEN THE EARTH, THAT HAD GIVEN UP A SWEET-SHARP FLAVOR AS THE BLADES TURNED IT THAT MORNING, NOW SMELLED JOYLESS. AND AS HE DUG THE BLACK SOIL OUT FROM AROUND THE STONE, HIS MIND RETURNED HELPLESSLY TO THE PUTREFACTION THAT MADE IT SO VERY RICH.



HE STOPPED FOR A MOMENT, REGRETTING THE FOURTH PINT OF GUINNESS HE'D DOWNED AT LUNCH. HE COULD HEAR IT, AS DARK AS THE SOIL ON HIS SPADE, WORKING UP A SCUM OF STOMACH ACID AND HALF-DIGESTED FOOD.

THINK OF SOMETHING ELSE, HE TOLD HIMSELF, OR YOU'LL GET TO PUKING.

SHIT!

NO JOY, OBVIOUSLY HE'D HAVE TO DIG THE MOUND DEEPER, DRIVE THE STAKES FURTHER.

HIS THOUGHTS CIRCLED VACUOUSLY ON THE COUNTLESS LITTLE DEATHS ON EVERY SPADEFUL OF SOIL HE DUG. THE MORBIDITY OF IT DISTRESSED HIM.

HE WASN'T GOING TO LET THE DAMN THING BEAT HIM.



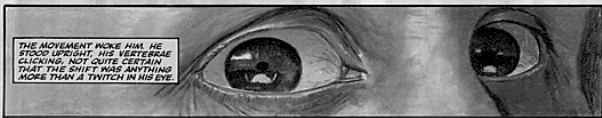
A FLECK OF RAIN HIT THE BACK OF HIS HAND, BUT HE SCARCELY NOTICED IT. HE KNEW BY EXPERIENCE THAT LABOR LIKE THIS TOOK SINGULARITY OF PURPOSE, HEAD DOWN, IGNORE ALL DISTRACTIONS.

HE MADE HIS MIND BLANK.

THE TRANCE WAS SO TOTAL HE WASN'T SURE HOW LONG HE WORKED BEFORE THE STONE BEGAN TO SHIFT.



THERE WAS JUST THE EARTH, THE SPADE, THE STONE AND HIS BODY. PUSH DOWN, SCOOP UP. PUSH DOWN, SCOOP UP: A HYPNOTIC RHYTHM OF EFFORT.



THE MOVEMENT WOKE HIM. HE
STOOD UPRIGHT, HIS VESTEREALE
CLICKING, NOT QUITE CERTAIN
THAT THE SHIFT WAS ANYTHING
MORE THAN A TWITCH IN HIS EYE.



HE PUSHED.

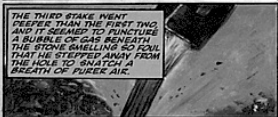
YES, IT ROCKED IN ITS GRAVE. HE
WAS TOO DRAINED TO SMILE, BUT
HE FELT VICTORY CLOSE.

HE HAD THE BUGGER.

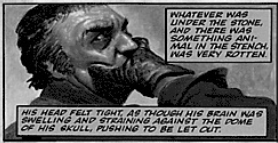


YOU'LL
SEE, YOU'LL
SEE.

THE RAIN WAS STARTING TO COME ON
HEAVIER NOW, AND IT FELT FINE ON
HIS FACE. HE WAS GOING TO GET
THE BETTER OF THE THING.



THE THIRD STAKE WENT
DEEPER THAN THE FIRST TWO,
AND IT SEEMED TO PUNCTURE
A BUBBLE OF GAS BENEATH
THE STONE SHELING SO FOUL
THAT HE STEPPED AWAY FROM
THE HOLE TO SNATCH A
BREATH OF PURER AIR.



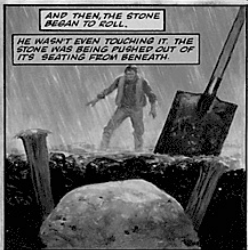
WHATEVER WAS
UNDER THE STONE,
AND THERE WAS
SOMETHING ANI-
MAL IN THE STENCH,
WAS VERY ROTTEN.

HIS HEAD FELT TIGHT, AS THOUGH HIS BRAIN WAS
SHELLING AND STRAINING AGAINST THE DOME
OF HIS SKULL, PUSHING TO BE LET OUT.



FUCK
YOU!

DO IT.
DO IT.
DO IT.



AND THEN, THE STONE
BEGAN TO ROLL.

HE WASN'T EVEN TOUCHING IT. THE
STONE WAS BEING PUSHED OUT OF
ITS SEATING FROM BENEATH.

...MY
SPADE... MY SPADE...
MY

HE SUDDENLY FELT POSSESSIVE OF THE SPADE. IT WAS HIS, PART OF HIM, AND HE DIDN'T WANT IT NEAR THE HOLE. NOT NOW! NOT WITH THE STONE ROCKING AS IF IT HAD A GEYSER UNDER IT ABOUT TO BLOW. NOT WITH THE AIR YELLOW AND HIS BRAIN SMELLING UP LIKE A MARROW IN AUGUST.

THE STONE ROLLED AWAY FROM THE TOMB AS IF FEATHER LIGHT, A SECOND CLOUD OF GAS MORE OBNOXIOUS THAN THE FIRST, SEEMED TO BLOW IT ON ITS WAY. AT THE SAME TIME, THE SPADE CAME OUT OF THE HOLE, AND THOMAS SAW WHAT HAD HOLD OF IT.

SUDDENLY THERE WAS NO SENSE IN HEAVEN OR EARTH.

NOW HE WANTED TO LET GO OF THE SPADE, BUT HE NO LONGER HAD THE WILL. ALL HE COULD DO WAS OBEY SOME IMPERATIVE FROM UNDERGROUND, TO HAUL UNTIL HIS LIGAMENTS TOOK AND HIS SINEWS BLED.

BENEATH THE THIN CRUST OF THE EARTH, FANHEAD SMELLED THE SKY. IT WAS PURE ETHER TO HIS DULLED SENSES, MAKING HIM SICK WITH PLEASURE. KINGDOMS FOR THE TAKING, JUST A FEW INCHES AWAY. AFTER SO MANY YEARS, AFTER ENDLESS SUFFOCATION, THERE WAS LIGHT ON HIS EYES AGAIN AND THE TASTE OF HUMAN TERROR ON HIS TONGUE.

HIS HEAD WAS BREAKING SURFACE NOW, HIS BLACK HAIR WREATHED WITH WORMS, HIS SCALP SEETHING WITH TINY RED SPIDERS.

AND INCH BY INCH KANHEAD WAS
HOISTED OUT OF HIS GRAVE.



THE STONE THAT HAD PRESSED HIM FOR SO LONG WAS GONE, AND HE WAS DRAGGING HIMSELF UP EASILY NOW, SLOUGHING OFF THE GIVE EARTH LIKE A SNAKE ITS SKIN.

HIS LIMBS WERE PUMPING WITH BLOOD LIKE A BUTTERFLY'S WINGS, JUICING WITH RESURRECTION. HIS LETHAL FINGERS RHYTHMICALLY CLAPED THE GROUND AS THEY GAINED STRENGTH.

THOMAS GARRON JUST STOOD AND WATCHED. THERE WAS NOTHING IN HIM BUT AWE. FEAR WAS FOR THOSE WHO STILL HAD A CHANCE OF LIFE. HE HAD NONE.

RAWHEAD STOOD UP FOR THE FIRST TIME IN CENTURIES.



FOR GARROW, DEATH WAS IMMINENT AND HE KNEW IT. HE LOOKED DOWN AT HIS LEGS THRASHING USELESSLY BELOW HIM, THEN HE LOOKED UP AND STARED DIRECTLY INTO RAINHEAD'S PITILESS FACE.

IT WAS HUGE, LIKE THE HARVEST MOON, HUGE AND AMBER. BUT THIS MOON HAD EYES THAT BURNED IN ITS FALLID, PITTED FACE. THEY WERE FOR ALL THE WORLD LIKE WOUNDS. THOSE EYES, AS THOUGH SOMEONE HAD SOURED THEM IN THE FLESH OF RAINHEAD'S FACE THEN SET TWO CANDLES TO FLICKER IN THE HOLES.

GARROW WAS ENTRANCED BY THE VASTNESS OF THIS MOON. HE LOOKED FROM EYE TO EYE, AND THEN TO THE WET SLITS THAT WERE ITS NOSE, AND FINALLY, IN A CHILDISH TERROR, DOWN TO ITS MOUTH. GOD, THAT MOUTH.



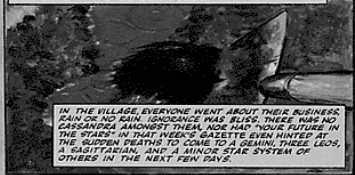
IT WAS SO WIDE, SO CAVERNOUS. IT SEEMED TO SPLIT THE HEAD IN TWO AS IT OPENED. THAT WAS THOMAS GARROW'S LAST THOUGHT. THAT THE MOON WAS SPLITTING IN TWO AND FALLING OUT OF THE SKY ON TOP OF HIM.



THEN THE KING INVERTED THE BODY, AS HAD ALWAYS BEEN THE WAY WITH HIS DEAD ENEMIES, AND DROVE THOMAS HEAD-FIRST INTO THE HOLE, WINDING HIM DOWN INTO THE VERY GRAVE HIS FOREFATHERS HAD INTENDED TO BURY KAINHEAD IN FOREVER.



BY THE TIME THE THUNDERSTORM PROPER BROKE OVER ZEAL, THE KING WAS A MILE AWAY FROM THE THREE-ACRE FIELD, SHELTERING IN THE NICHOLSON BARN.



IN THE VILLAGE, EVERYONE WENT ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS. RAIN OR NO RAIN, IGNORANCE WAS BLISS. THERE WAS NO CASSANDRA AMONGST THEM, NOR HAD "YOUR FUTURE IN THE STARS" IN THAT WEEK'S GAZETTE EVEN HINTED AT THE SUDDEN DEATHS TO COME TO A GEMINI, THREE LEOS, A SAGITTARIAN, AND A MINOR STAR SYSTEM OF OTHERS IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS.



THE RAIN HAD COME WITH THE THUNDER, FAT COOL SPOTS OF IT, WHICH RAPIDLY TURNED INTO A DOWNPOUR OF MONSOONAL FEROCITY.



ONLY WHEN THE GUTTERS BECAME TORRENTS DID THE PEOPLE BEGIN TO TAKE SHELTER.

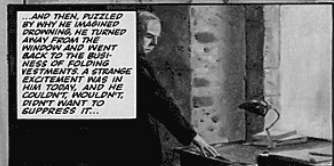


IN THE DOORWAY OF THE POST OFFICE, THREE OF THE VILLAGERS WATCHED THE DRAINS BACKING UP AND TIPPED THAT IN HALF AN HOUR THERE'D BE A POOL OF WATER IN THE DIP AT THE BOTTOM OF HIGH STREET.

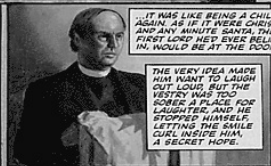


DOWN IN THE DIP ITSELF, IN THE VESTRY OF SAINT PETER'S, DECLAN EWAN, THE VERGER, WATCHED THE RAIN GATHERING INTO A LITTLE SEA OUTSIDE THE VESTRY GATE.

SOON BE DEEP ENOUGH TO DROWN IN, HE THOUGHT...



...AND THEN, PUZZLED BY WHY HE IMAGINED DROWNING, HE TURNED AWAY FROM THE WINDOW AND WENT BACK TO THE BUSINESS OF FOLDING VESTMENTS. A STRANGE EXCITEMENT WAS IN HIM TODAY, AND HE COULDN'T, WOULDN'T, DIDN'T WANT TO SUPPRESS IT...



...IT WAS LIKE BEING A CHILD AGAIN, AS IF IT WERE CHRISTMAS AND ANY MINUTE SANTA, THE FIRST LORD HE'D EVER BELIEVED IN, WOULD BE AT THE DOOR.

THE VERY IDEA MADE HIM WANT TO LAUGH OUT LOUD, BUT THE VESTRY WAS TOO SOBER A PLACE FOR LAUGHTER, AND HE STOPPED HIMSELF, LETTING THE SMILE CURL INSIDE HIM, A SECRET HOPE.

WHILE EVERYONE ELSE TOOK REFUGE FROM THE RAIN, GWEN NICHOLSON WAS COAXING AMELIA'S PONY TOWARD THE BARN.

THE THUNDER HAD MADE THE STUPID BEAST JITTERY, AND IT DIDN'T WANT TO BUDGE. NOW GWEN WAS SOAKED AND ANGRY.

WILL YOU COME ON, YOU BRUTE!!

COME ON! COME ON!

WHACK

RUSH BARN. COME ON. IT'S WET OUT HERE, YOU DON'T WANT TO STAY OUT HERE.

SURELY THE OPEN BARN DOOR MUST LOOK LIKE AN INVITING PROSPECT, EVEN TO A FEAR-BRAINED PONY.

AS SHE PROMISED THE DAMN THING, THE INTERIOR OF THE BARN WAS SWEET AND DRY, THOUGH THE AIR SMELLED METALLIC WITH THE STORM.

THE PONY WAS STILL PANICKING. IT STAMPED AND ROLLED ITS EYES LIKE A BAD TRAGEDIAN. A LITTLE APOLOGETICALLY GWEN PATTED ITS FLANK. SHE'D LOST HER TEMPER.

SHE WAS DAMNED IF SHE WAS GOING TO SWAB THE CREATURE DOWN. THAT WAS AMELIA'S JOB. THAT WAS THE BARGAIN SHE'D MADE WITH HER DAUGHTER WHEN THEY'D AGREED TO BUY THE PONY, AND TO BE FAIR TO HER, SHE'D DONE WHAT SHE'D PROMISED, MORE OR LESS.

THAT TIME OF THE MONTH.

NOW SHE REGRETTED IT. SHE ONLY HOPED AMELIA HADN'T BEEN AT HER BEDROOM WINDOW WATCHING.

A GUST OF WIND CAUGHT THE BARN DOOR, AND IT SHUING CLOSED THE SOUND OF RAIN ON THE YARD OUTSIDE WAS ABRUPTLY MUTED.

THE PONY STOPPED STAMPING. GWEN STOPPED STROKING ITS SIDE. EVERYTHING STOPPED--HER HEART TOO. IT SEEMED.

SLAMASH



RAWHEAD STOOD AND LOOKED AT THE NAPE OF GWEN NICHOLSON'S NECK. WHERE A SINGLE NIP WOULD EASILY KILL. BUT THERE WAS NO WAY HE COULD BRING HIMSELF TO TOUCH THIS WOMAN--NOT TODAY.

GWEN DIDN'T SEE THE GIANT, BUT HER INWARDS CHURNED DAMN PERIODS. SHE WAS NORMALLY AS REGULAR AS CLOCKWORK, BUT THIS MONTH SHE'D COME ON A DAY EARLY. SHE SHOULD GO BACK TO THE HOUSE, GET CHANGED, GET CLEAN.



SHE HAD THE BLOOD CYCLE ON HER. HE COULD TASTE ITS TANG, AND IT SICKENED HIM. IT WAS TABOO, THAT BLOOD, AND HE HAD NEVER TAKEN A WOMAN POISONED BY ITS PRESENCE.

FEELING THE DAMP BETWEEN HER LEGS, GWEN HURRIED BACK TO THE HOUSE, LEAVING THE FRETTING PONY IN THE DARKNESS OF THE BARN.



HE WAITED, TO BE SURE SHE WOULDN'T COME BACK, THEN PADDED ACROSS TO THE ANIMAL.

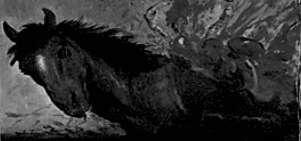
HIS GUMS WERE GUFFUSED WITH BLOOD AS THE TEETH EMERGED FROM THEM, LIKE CLAWS UNSHEATHED FROM A CAT'S PAW.



THE PONY KICKED AND COMPLAINED, BUT RAINHEAD HAD IN HIS TIME TAKEN ANIMALS FAR BIGGER AND FAR BETTER ARMED THAN THIS.

THICK, FRESH BLOOD POURED DOWN RAINHEAD'S THROAT; HE GULPED IT GREEDILY, THE HOT TASTE OF THE WORLD. IT MADE HIM FEEL STRONG AND WISE.

THIS WAS ONLY THE FIRST OF MANY MEALS HE WOULD TAKE. HE'D GORGE ON ANYTHING THAT TOOK HIS FANCY, AND NOBODY WOULD STOP HIM--NOT THIS TIME. AND WHEN HE WAS READY, HE'D THROW THOSE PRETENDERS OFF HIS THRONE; HE'D CREMATE THEM IN THEIR HOUSES; HE'D SLAUGHTER THEIR CHILDREN AND WEAR THEIR INFANTS' BOWELS AS NECKLACES.



THIS PLACE WAS HIS. THAT THEY'D TAMED THE WILDERNESS FOR A WHILE DIDN'T MEAN THEY OWNED THE EARTH. IT WAS HIS, AND NOBODY WOULD TAKE IT FROM HIM, NOT EVEN THE HOLINESS.

HE WAS WISE TO THAT TOO. THEY'D NEVER SURDUCE HIM AGAIN.

HE SAT, THE KING, PLANNING HIS TACTICS AS BEST HE COULD. HE'D NEVER BEEN A GREAT THINKER. TOO MUCH APPETITE--IT OVERWHELMED HIS REASON. HE LIVED IN THE ETERNAL PRESENT OF HIS HUNGER AND HIS STRENGTH, FEELING ONLY THE CRUDE TERRITORIAL INSTINCT THAT WOULD SOONER OR LATER BLOSSOM INTO GARNAGE.



THE RAIN DIDN'T LET UP FOR AN HOUR.

RON MILTON WAS BECOMING IMPATIENT. A FLAW IN HIS NATURE THAT HAD GIVEN HIM AN ULCER AND A TOP-FLIGHT JOB IN DESIGN CONSULTANCY. WHAT MILTON COULD GET DONE FOR YOU, COULDN'T BE DONE QUICKER, AND HE HATED BLOTH IN OTHER PEOPLE AS MUCH AS IN HIMSELF.



TAKE THIS DAMN HOUSE. FOR INSTANCE--PROMISED BY MID-JULY AND STILL FAR FROM HABITABLE TWO MONTHS AFTER THAT DATE.

THIS WAS TO BE HIS CASTLE, HIS RETREAT FROM A WORLD THAT MADE HIM DYSPHETIC AND RICH, WHERE MAGGIE COULD GROW ROSES, AND THE CHILDREN COULD BREATHE CLEAN AIR.

EXCEPT THAT IT WASN'T READY.



WHERE ARE THE KIDS?

BACK AT THE HOTEL, DRYING HER BLATTER CLOTHS.

THEN WE'D BETTER GET BACK TO TOWN.

NO, PLEASE--LET'S STAY ANOTHER DAY OR TWO. I WANT US ALL TO GO TO THE HARVEST FESTIVAL SERVICES ON SUNDAY.

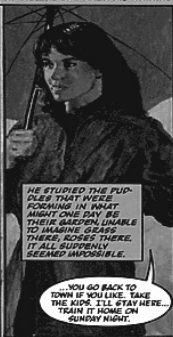
OH, WELL.



IT'S ALL PART OF VILLAGE LIFE, RONNIE. IF WE'RE GOING TO LIVE HERE, WE HAVE TO BECOME PART OF THE COMMUNITY.

I DON'T WANT TO.

MAGGIE HAD HER FEATURES SET IN CONCRETE. SHE WASN'T GOING TO BUDGE AN INCH. HE KNEW THAT FACE AS WELL AS SHE KNEW HIS WHINING.



HE STUDIED THE PUDDLES THAT WERE POCKING IN WHAT MIGHT ONE DAY BE THEIR GARDEN, UNABLE TO IMAGINE GRASS THERE, ROSES THERE. IT ALL SUPPENLY SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE.

...YOU GO BACK TO TOWN IF YOU LIKE. TAKE THE KIDS. I'LL STAY HERE... TRAIN IT HOME ON SUNDAY NIGHT.

CLEVER, TO GIVE HIM A GET-OUT THAT'S MORE UNATTRACTIVE THAN STAYING PUT. TWO DAYS IN TOWN LOOKING AFTER THE KIDS ALONE? NO, THANK YOU.

OK, YOU WIN, WE'LL GO TO THE HARVEST-BLOODY-FESTIVAL.

MARTY.



AS LONG AS I DON'T HAVE TO PRAY.

WELL, WE'VE NO CHOICE.

WE CAN GO BACK TONIGHT.

RONNIE--



AMELIA!?



PENNY!

THEIR LITTLE GIRL WAS SHIVERING IN HER FANT, HER MOUTH CHEWING AT A WORD, OR WORDS, THAT WOULDN'T COME



WHAT IS IT?

FOR CHRIST SAKE, WHAT'S WRONG WITH HER?

AMBULANCE, PENNY...



FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, PENNY-AMBULANCE!



DENNY WASN'T LISTENING. THERE WAS SOMEBODY IN THE BARN, ON HIS PROPERTY, AND HE HAD A STRICT RITUAL FOR TRESPASSERS. THE BARN DOOR OPENED AGAIN, TEASING. YES! RETREATING INTO THE DARK, INTERLOPER.



BEHIND HIM, GWEN HAD LEFT AMELIA ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR AND WAS DIALING FOR HELP

THE GIRL WAS MOANING NOW... SHE WAS GOING TO BE OKAY. JUST SOME FILTHY TRESPASSER SCARING HER, THAT'S ALL...



THE BARN DOOR SWUNG LISTLESSLY AGAIN AND THIS TIME STAYED OPEN. HE COULD SEE NOTHING INSIDE. HALF WONDERED IF A TRICK OF THE LIGHT HAD--

BUT NO. HE'D SEEN SOMEONE MOVING IN THERE. THE BARN WASN'T EMPTY. SOMETHING (NOT THE PONY) WAS WATCHING HIM EVEN NOW. THEY'D SEE THE RIFLE, AND THEN THEY'D SWEAT.

HE COVERED THE DISTANCE IN
HALF A DOZEN CONFIDENT STRIDES
AND STEPPED INTO THE BARN.



THE PONY'S STOMACH WAS BENEATH HIS SHOE, ONE OF
ITS LEGS TO HIS RIGHT, THE UPPER SHANK GNAWED TO
THE BONE. POOLS OF THICKENING BLOOD REFLECTED
THE HOLES IN THE ROOF. THE MUTILATION MADE HIM
WANT TO HEAVE.



ALL
RIGHT, COME
OUT.

YOU HEAR
ME, YOU BASTARD?
OUT, I SAID, OR
I'LL BLOW YOU
TO KINGDOM
COME.



HE MEANT IT, TOO.

AT THE FAR END OF THE
BARN SOMETHING STIRRED
AMONGST THE BALES.

NOW I'VE GOT THE
SON OF A BITCH,
HE THOUGHT.



THE TRESPASSER GOT UP,
ALL NINE FEET OF HIM,
AND STARED AT DENNY.

JEE-SUS...





THE STONES OF THE YARD WERE SLIPPERY BENEATH HIS SHOES, AND HE HAD NO TURN OF SPEED TO OUT-RUN THE THING. IT WAS AT HIS BACK IN TWO BEATS...



...AND ON HIM IN ANOTHER.



IT HIT THE YARD WITH A THUD GIVEN NICHOLSON FELT IN HER EVERY BONE.



GIVEN DROPPED THE PHONE WHEN SHE HEARD THE SHOT. SHE RACED TO THE WINDOW IN TIME TO SEE HER SWEET DENNY ECLIPSED BY THE GARGANTUAN FORM.

IT HOWLED AS IT TOOK HIM, AND THREW HIM UP INTO THE AIR LIKE A SACK OF FEATHERS. SHE WATCHED HELPLESSLY AS HIS BODY TWISTED AT THE APEX OF ITS JOURNEY BEFORE BEING THROWN BACK DOWN TO EARTH AGAIN.

NOOO!



THE GIANT WAS AT HIS BODY LIKE A SHOT, TEARING HIS LOVING FACE TO MUCK.

SHE TRIED TO SILENCE HER SCREAM WITH HER HAND. TOO LATE...

...THE SOUND WAS OUT, AND THE GIANT WAS LOOKING AT HER, STRAIGHT AT HER, ITS MUCKY PIERCING THE WINDOW.

OH GOD, IT HAD SEEN HER, AND NOW IT WAS COMING FOR HER, LOPIING ACROSS THE YARD, A NAKED ENGINE, AND GINNING A PROMISE AT HER AS IT CAME.

MAYBE AMELIA WOULDN'T SEE. NO, SHE MUSTN'T SEE. THE SOUND OF ITS FEET CLAPPING ON THE YARD GOT LOUDER. ITS SHADOW FILLED THE KITCHEN.

JESUS
HELP ME.

IT WAS PRESSING AT THE WINDOW, ITS BODY SO WIDE THAT IT CANCELLED OUT THE LIGHT, ITS LEADY REVOLTING FACE SNEAKED ON THE MURTRY FINE.

IT SMELLED
CHILD MEAT.

IT WANTED
CHILD MEAT.

IT WOULD HAVE
CHILD MEAT.

FANHEAD IGNORED THE GLASS AND SPLINTERS THAT BIT INTO HIS FLESH, ITS TEETH SPILLING INTO VIEW, WIDENING THAT SMILE INTO AN ORSCINE LAUGH, LIKE A CAT AFTER A MOUSE IN A CAGE, IT PRESSED FURTHER AND FURTHER IN, EACH SWIPE CLOSER TO THE MORSEL.



HALFWAY UP THE STAIRS, THE NOISE IN THE KITCHEN STOPPED UTTERLY.

DREAMING IT.

SHE SUDDENLY HAD A REALITY CHECK. ON THE LANDING WHERE SHE STOOD, ALL WAS PEACE AND CALM. POST GATHERED MINUTELY ON THE JUNGUNKILLS. FLOWERS WILTED; ALL THE INFINITESIMAL DOMESTIC FEELURES WENT ON AS THOUGH NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.

GOO. YES. DREAMING IT.

SOME VILE MENSTRUAL NIGHTMARE, THAT'S WHAT IT WAS. SOME RAPE FANTASY OUT OF ALL CONTROL.



DREAMING IT.



JUST DREAM...





BEHIND THEM, GLASS SHATTERED,
AND A GUST OF COLD AIR SWEEPED
INTO THE BEDROOM.

IT WAS COMING...



ITS MOUTH A TUNNEL, WHOOPING AS IT
REACHED TO STEAL THE MUTE PARCEL IN
THE MOTHER'S ARMS.

SHE COULDN'T OUTFRUIT IT.
SHE COULDN'T OUTFIGHT IT.
ITS HANDS FIRMED ON AMELIA
WITH INSOLENT EASE.



GIVEN STUMBLER BACK, DIZZIED BY
THE UNTHINKABLE SIGHT IN FRONT
OF HER, AND LOST BALANCE AT
THE TOP OF THE STAIRS.



AS SHE FELL BACKWARD, SHE SAW AMELIA,
ROLL-STIFF, BEING FED BETWEEN
THOSE ROWS OF TEETH.



THEN HER HEAD HIT THE BANNISTER,
AND HER NECK BROKE. SHE BOUNCED
DOWN THE LAST SIX STEPS A CORPSE.

REVEREND COOT COULDN'T MAKE MUCH SENSE OF SERMON-WRITING THIS EVENING. THERE WAS AN UNEASE IN THE AIR TODAY THAT MADE EVERY REASSURING WORD HE COMMITTED TO PAPER CURDLE AS HE WROTE IT.



AND HIS PALMS ITCHED.

IF HE COULD ONLY SPEAK TO DECLAN ERWAN, FIND SOME WORDS TO SHAPE HIS DISTRESS.

HERE I AM, A MAN OF THE CLOTH, DEDICATED TO THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERIES. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FORTY-ODD YEARS I'VE HAD A REAL GLIMPSE OF SOMETHING, A VISION MAYBE, AND I'M SCARED OF BEING LAUGHED AT.



I DON'T QUITE KNOW HOW TO SAY THIS...OUR VOCABULARYS IMPROVERISHED WHEN IT COMES TO THESE SORTS OF THINGS...BUT THIS MORNING I HAD A...A...VISITATION. SUCH AN UNEQUIVOCAL MANIFESTATION OF...

DID HE MEAN GOD?

DECLAN SAID NOTHING. THE EGG HADN'T CRACKED.

GOD

CAN YOU SAY WHAT IT WAS LIKE?

HE'D BEEN TRYING TO FIND THE WORDS ALL DAY, BUT THE PHRASES ALL SEEMED SO PREDICTABLE.

NEVER, IN HIS FORTY-FIVE YEARS, HAD HE FELT SO INCAPABLE OF COMMUNICATION. AND NEVER IN THOSE YEARS HAD IT BEEN SO VITAL THAT HE TALK.



SHALL I GO NOW?

A MOMENT LONGER...IF YOU WOULD.

WHAT WILL THIS EGGFACE MAKE OF AN REVELATION? THOUGHT: GOD. HE'LL PROBABLY LAUGH. THAT'S WHY I CAN'T FIND THE WORDS-BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO. I'M AFRAID OF LOOKING STUPID.

"I WAS AT THE ALTAR AFTER MORNING PRAYER...AND I FELT SOMETHING GOING THROUGH ME. LIKE ELECTRICITY ALMOST. IT MADE MY HAIR STAND ON END. LITERALLY ON END."



COOT REMEMBERED THE SENSATION, THAT BUZZING AT THE TEMPLES, IN HIS LUNGS AT HIS GROIN. IT HAD ACTUALLY GIVEN HIM A HARD-ON. NOT THAT HE WAS GOING TO TELL DECLAN THAT. BUT HE'D STOOD THERE AT THE ALTAR WITH AN ERECTION SO FORTHWITH IT WAS LIKE DISCOVERING THE JOY OF LUST ALL OVER AGAIN.



"I DON'T CLAIM...I CAN'T CLAIM IT WAS OUR LORD GOD..."

THOUGH HE WANTED TO BELIEVE THAT—THAT HIS GOD WAS LORD OF THE HARD-ON.

"...I CAN'T EVEN CLAIM IT WAS CHRISTIAN. BUT SOMETHING HAPPENED TODAY. I FELT IT."



NOTHING TO SAY?

GOD HELP US.

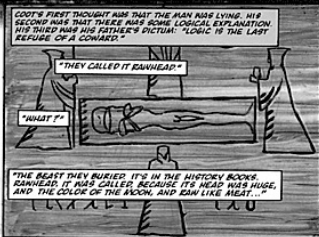
I FELT IT TOO. NOT QUITE AS YOU DESCRIBE, NOT QUITE AN ELECTRIC SHOCK, BUT SOMETHING.

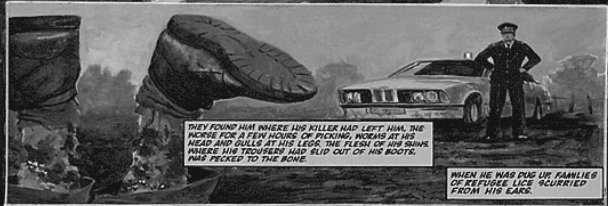


WAS IT STILL DESPAIR IN HIS EYES?
OR WAS IT NOSTALGIA?



ONE OF THEM SURVIVED AS LATE AS THE 1400s. THERE'S A CARVING OF IT BEING BURIED. IT'S ON THE ALTAR.







RANHEAD WATCHED SERGEANT GISSING'S CAR CRAWL OUT OF THE VILLAGE AND ALONG THE NORTH ROAD, THE HEADLIGHTS MAKING VERY LITTLE IMPRESSION ON THE NIGHT.

THE NOISE OF THE ENGINE MADE RANHEAD NERVOUS THOUGH, AS IT OVER-REVVED UP THE HILL PAST THE NICHOLSON FARM. IT ROARED AND COUGHED LIKE NO BEAST HE HAD ENCOUNTERED BEFORE, AND SOMEHOW THE HOMO SAPIENS HAD CONTROL OF IT.

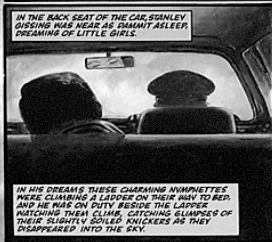


IF THE KINGDOM WAS TO BE TAKEN BACK FROM THE USURPERS, SOONER OR LATER HE WOULD HAVE TO BEST ONE OF THESE BEASTS. RANHEAD SWALLOWED HIS FEAR AND PREPARED FOR THE CONFRONTATION.

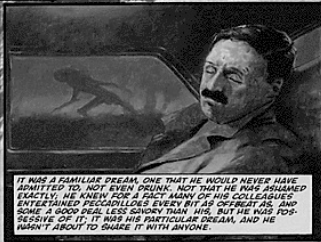
THE MOON GREW TEETH.



IN THE BACK SEAT OF THE CAR, STANLEY GISSING WAS NEAR AS DAMNIT ASLEEP, DREAMING OF LITTLE GIRLS.



IN HIS DREAMS THESE CHARMING NYMPHETTES WERE CLIMBING A LADDER ON THEIR WAY TO BED, AND HE WAS ON DUTY BESIDE THE LADDER, WATCHING THEM CLIMB, CATCHING GLIMPSES OF THEIR SLIGHTLY SOILED KNICKERS AS THEY DISAPPEARED INTO THE SKY.



IT WAS A FAMILIAR DREAM, ONE THAT HE WOULD NEVER HAVE ADMITTED TO, NOT EVEN DRUNK. NOT THAT HE WAS ASSUMED EXACTLY. HE KNEW FOR A FACT MANY OF HIS COLLEAGUES ENTERTAINED PEGGADILLOES EVERY BIT AS OFFBEAT AS, AND SOME A GOOD DEAL LESS SAVORY THAN HIS, BUT HE WAS POSSESSIVE OF IT; IT WAS HIS PARTICULAR DREAM, AND HE WASN'T ABOUT TO SHARE IT WITH ANYONE.



RAINHEAD HAD OTHER NOTIONS...



...AND GRIPPING HIS FLING FROM
THE LADDER HE WAS CLIMBING...

... INTO A HUSKING WORLD THAT
HOWLED LIKE A PACK OF WILD DOGS.



FROM THE ROAD, RAINHEAD WATCHED THE DEATH OF
THE METAL BOX. ITS TORTURED VOICE, THE HOWLING
OF ITS WRETCHED FLANK, THE SHATTERING OF ITS
FACE. FRIGHTENED HIM.



BUT IT WAS DEAD.



HE WAITED A FEW CAUTIOUS MOMENTS BEFORE ADVANCING TO SNIFF THE CRUMPLED BODY. THERE WAS AN ACIDATIC SMELL IN THE AIR, WHICH PRICKED HIS SINUSES, AND THE CAUSE OF IT, THE BLOOD OF THE BOY, WAS DRIEBLING OUT OF ITS BROKEN TORSO AND RUNNING AWAY DOWN THE ROAD. HE WAS CERTAIN NOW THAT IT WAS FINISHED.



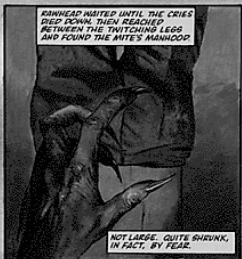
THERE WAS SOMEONE ALIVE IN THE BOX. NONE OF THE SWEET CHILD FLESH HE SAVORED SO MUCH, JUST TOUGH MALLEABLE.

IT WAS A COMICAL FACE THAT PEERED AT HIM. ITS SILLY MOUTH OPENED AND CLOSED LIKE A FISH'S.



WAS THIS ONE OF THE SPECIES THAT HAD SURROUNDED HIM? THIS FEARFUL MUTE, WITH ITS JELLYLIPS?

OH GOD...
OH JESUS...



RAWHEAD WAITED UNTIL THE CRIES DIED DOWN, THEN REACHED BETWEEN THE TWITCHING LEGS AND FOUND THE MUTE'S MAINDOOR.

NOT LARGE... QUITE SHRUNK, IN FACT, BY FEAR.



GISSING HAD BLATHERED ALL KINDS OF STUFF. NONE OF IT MADE ANY SENSE.

AAIEEEEE!!

THE ONLY SOUND RAINHEAD UNDERSTOOD FROM THE MOUTH OF THE MAN WAS THIS SOUND HE WAS HEARING NOW. THIS HIGH-PITCHED SHRIEK THAT ALWAYS ATTENDED A GELPING.

A FIRE HAD BEGUN IN THE SMASHED ENGINE. HE COULD SMELL IT. HE WAS NOT SO MUCH A BEAST THAT HE FEARED FIRE, RESPECTED IT, YES, BUT NOT FEARED.

FIRE WAS A TOOL HE'D USED MANY TIMES--TO BURN OUT HIS ENEMIES, TO CREMATE THEM IN THEIR REPS.

THE FIRE FOLLOWED THE BLOOD OF THE BEAST, CONSUMING GISSING AND LICKING ALONG THE RIVERS OF PETROL LIKE AN EAGER DOG AFTER A TRAIL OF PILES.

RAINHEAD WATCHED AND LEARNED A NEW AND LETHAL LESSON.



IN THE QUAD OF HIS STUDY, COOT WAS UNSUCCESSFULLY FIGHTING OFF SLEEP. HE'D SPENT A GOOD DEAL OF THE EVENING AT THE ALTAR, SOME OF IT WITH PECLAN. TONIGHT THERE'D BE NO PRAYING, JUST SKETCHING.

EITHER THE CARVING WAS TOO AMBIGUOUS, OR HIS IMAGINATION LACKED BREADTH. WHICHEVER, HE COULD MAKE VERY LITTLE SENSE OF THE IMAGE.

HE THOUGHT OF ZEAL'S FUN "THE TALL MAN," AND SMILED. IT MIGHT WELL HAVE PLEASED SOME MEDIEVAL WIT TO PICTURE THE BURIAL OF A BREWER UNDER THE ALTAR CLOTH.

IN THE HALL, THE SICK CLOCK STRUCK TWELVE-FIFTEEN WHICH MEANT IT WAS ALMOST ONE. SOMEWHERE OVER TOWARD GOLDENWEST, HE HEARD THE SOUND OF AN AMBULANCE SIREN.

THERE WERE CAR HEADLIGHTS ON THE HILL, AND THE DISTANT THROB OF BLUE POLICE LIGHTS, MORE RHYTHMICAL THAN THE CLOCK TICKING AT HIS BACK. ACCIDENT ON THE NORTH ROAD, EARLY FOR ICE, AND SURELY NOT COLD ENOUGH. HE WATCHED THE LIGHTS SET ON THE HILL LIKE JEWELS ON THE BACK OF A WHALE, WINKING AWAY. IT WAS QUITE CHILLY, COME TO THINK OF IT. NO WEATHER TO BE STANDING IN THE --

OOOEEEE OOOEEEE
OOOEEEE

SOMETHING CAUGHT HIS EYE, A MOVEMENT IN THE FAR CORNER OF THE CHURCH YARD UNDERNEATH THE TREES...

BLACK YEW, GRAY STONES, A WHITE CHRYSANTHEMUM STREPPING ITS PETALS ON A GRAVE. AND BLACK IN THE SHADOW OF THE YEW, BUT OUTLINED CLEARLY AGAINST THE SLAB OF MARBLE TOMB BEYOND...

...A GIANT.

THE GIANT WAS NOT ALONE.

SOMEBODY WAS KNEELING IN FRONT OF IT; A SMALLER, MORE HUMAN SHAPE, ITS FACE RAISED AND CLEAR IN THE LIGHT.

COOT WANTED TO GET CLOSER, A BETTER LOOK AT THE NIGHTMARE.

ON THE THIRD STEP HIS FOOT CRUNCHED ON A PIECE OF GRYVEL.

IT WAS DECLAN. EVEN FROM A DISTANCE IT WAS CLEAR HE WAS SMILING UP AT HIS MASTER.

THE GIANT SEEMED TO SHIFT IN THE SHADOWS. WAS IT TURNING TO LOOK AT HIM? COOT CHWED ON HIS HEART. NO, LET IT BE DEAF; PLEASE GOD, LET IT NOT SEE ME, MAKE ME INVISIBLE.

THE PLAYER WAS APPARENTLY ANSWERED. THE GIANT MADE NO SIGN OF HAVING SEEN HIS APPROACH. HE WAS WITHIN A FEW FEET OF THE TABLEAU NOW, AND HE COULD SEE THE WAY THE CREATURE'S HEAD WAS BOWED TOWARD DECLAN; HE COULD HEAR THE SOUND IT WAS MAKING IN THE BACK OF HIS THROAT, LIKE SANDPAPER ON STONE.

BUT THERE WAS MORE TO THE SCENE.

DECLAN'S VESTMENTS WERE TORN AND DIRTYED. HIS STATE AND HIS POSITION WERE UNEQUIVOCAL. THIS WAS ADORATION--PURE AND SIMPLE.

THEN COOT HEARD THE BFLASHING.

THE GIANT WAS DIRECTING A GLISTENING ROPE OF ITS URINE ONTO DECLAN'S UPTURNED FACE; THE GLEAM OF JOY DIDN'T LEAVE DECLAN'S EYES FOR A MOMENT AS HE RECEIVED HIS BAPTISM; INDEED, HE TURNED HIS HEAD SIDE TO SIDE IN EAGERNESS TO BE TOTALLY DEFILED.

THE SMELL OF THE CREATURE'S DISCHARGE WASTED ACROSS TO COOT. IT WAS ACIDIC, VILE. HOW COULD DECLAN BEAR TO HAVE A DROP OF IT ON HIM, MUCH LESS BATHE IN IT?



COOT WANTED TO CRY OUT, STOP THE DEPRIVITY, BUT EVEN IN THE SHADOW OF THE YEW, THE SHAPE OF THE BEAST WAS TERRIFYING. IT WAS TOO TALL AND TOO BROAD TO BE HUMAN.

THIS WAS SURELY THE BEAST OF THE WILD WOODS DECLAN HAD BEEN TRYING TO DESCRIBE. THIS WAS THE CHILD-DEVOURER. HAD DECLAN GUESSED, WHEN HE EULOGIZED ABOUT THE MONSTER, WHAT POWER IT WOULD HAVE OVER HIS IMAGINATION? HAD HE KNOWN ALL ALONG THAT IF THE BEAST WERE TO COME SNIFFING FOR HIM, HE'D KNEEL IN FRONT OF IT, CALL IT LORD, LET IT DISCHARGE ITS BLADDER ON TO HIM, AND SMILE?



YES. OH, YES.



AND SO LET HIM HAVE HIS MOMENT. DON'T RISK YOUR NECK FOR HIM, COOT THOUGHT. HE'S WHERE HE WANTS TO BE.



THE BAPTISM DRIBBLED TO A HALT, BUT DECLAN'S HANDS, CUPPED IN FRONT OF HIM, STILL HELD A QUANTITY OF FLUID.



YES!



COOT GARGLED, UNABLE TO PREVENT HIMSELF.



THE SHADOWY HEAD TURNED TOWARD HIM, LOOKING AT HIM WITH EYES THAT BURNED IN THE BLACKNESS.



SWEET
JESUS.



ALREADY IT WAS CHARGING TOWARDS
HIM, ANTELOPE-LIKE, LEAVING ITS
ACOLYTE SLUMPED BENEATH THE TREE.



COOT RAN, RAN AS HE HADN'T
IN MANY A LONG YEAR, HUK-
PLING GRAVES AS HE FLED.

IT WAS JUST A FEW
YARDS. THE POOL.
SOME KIND OF SAFETY.
NOT FOR LONG, MAYBE.
BUT TIME TO THINK
TO FIND A WEAPON.



RUN, YOU OLD BASTARD.
CHRIST THE RACE,
CHRIST THE PRIZE.

FOUR YARDS.

RUN.



A YARD TO GO--





RANHEAD'S FEAR
BECAME A HOWL
VENOM AND AGONY
MINGLED IN THE
PIN THAT WAS
HEARD FROM
ONE END OF ZEAL
TO THE OTHER.

IT STAINED THE NIGHT UP AS FAR AS THE
NORTH ROAD, WHERE THE REMAINS OF
GISSING AND HIS DRIVER WERE BEING
SCRAPED UP AND PARCELLED IN PLASTIC.
IT ECHOED ROUND THE ICY WALLS OF THE
CHAPEL OF REST WHERE DENNY AND
GIVEN NICHOLSON WERE ALREADY
BEGINNING TO DEGENERATE.

IT WAS HEARD, TOO, IN THE BEDROOMS
OF ZEAL, WHERE COUPLES LAY SIDE BY
SIDE, MAYBE AN ARM NUMBED UNDER
THE OTHER'S BODY; WHERE THE OLD LAY
AWAKE WORKING OUT THE GEOGRAPHY
OF THE CEILING; WHERE CHILDREN
DREAMED OF THE HIGHER, AND BAWIES
MOURNED IT. IT WAS HEARD AGAIN AND
AGAIN AS RANHEAD RAN AT THE DOOR.

THE HOWL MADE COOT'S HEAD SWIM.
HIS MOUTH WAS BARBLING PRAYERS,
BUT THE MUCH-NEEDED SUPPORT
FROM ON HIGH SHOWED NO SIGN OF
COMING. HE FELT HIS STRENGTH
EBBING AWAY. THE GIANT WAS
STEADILY GAINING ACCESS, PRESSING
THE DOOR OPEN, INCH BY INCH.

COOT PRESSED HARDER
AGAINST THE WOOD, HIS EYES
PARTING AROUND THE
HALLWAY LOOKING FOR A
WEAPON. IT MUSTN'T GET IN.
IT MUSTN'T HAVE MASTERY
OVER HIM.

A BITTER SMELL WAS IN HIS NOSTRILS.
RANHEAD'S MIND WAS WORKING ITS
WAY INTO HIS. A THICK WEDGE OF
FILTH PRESSING ITS WAY THROUGH HIS
MEMORIES, ENCOURAGING BURIED
THOUGHTS TO THE SURFACE.



THIS WAS A CONTEST HE HAD NO
CHANCE OF WINNING. NOT IF HE TRIED
TO MATCH HIS STRENGTH TO THAT OF
THE BEAST, SINCE FOR GIVEN, IF
COOT WAS TO SEE TOMORROW
MORNING, HE NEEDED SOME STRATEGY.



RANHEAD. IT'S NAME WAS A
PULSE IN HIS EAR--RAN. HEAD.



WOULDN'T IT ASK FOR WORSHIP JUST LIKE ANY GOD? AND WOULDN'T ITS DEMANDS BE PLAIN, AND REAL? NOT AMBIGUOUS, LIKE THOSE OF THE LORD HE'D SERVED UP 'TIL NOW.



THAT WAS A FINE THOUGHT: TO GIVE HIMSELF UP TO THIS CERTAINTY THAT BEAT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR, AND LIE OPEN IN FRONT OF IT, AND LET IT RAVAGE HIM.

RAW. HEAD. RAW. HEAD. THE NAME WAS AN IMPERATIVE. RAW. HEAD. RAW. HEAD.

IT EVOKED A SKINNED HEAD, ITS DEFENSES PULLED BACK, A THING CLOSE TO RUSTING, NOT TELLING IF IT WAS PAIN OR PLEASURE, BUT EASY TO FIND OUT.



IT ALMOST HAD POSSESSION OF HIM. HE KNEW IT. IT WAS NOW OR NEVER.

RAWHEAD HAD TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE LACK OF FORCE BEHIND THE DOOR, ITS LEATHERY ARM WORKING ITS WAY IN, INDIFFERENT TO THE WAY THE DOOR JAMB SCORED THE SKIN.



THE HAND, ITS FINGERS STRONG AS STEEL, HAD CAUGHT THE FOLDS OF COOT'S JACKET.

THE WEAPON SPLINTERED ON IMPACT, BUT IT DID THE JOB. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR, THE HOWL BEGAN AGAIN.



RAWHEAD'S ARM WAS RAPIDLY WITHDRAWN, AS THE FINGERS SLID OUT, COOT SLAMMED THE DOOR AND BOLTED IT. THERE WAS A SHORT HIATUS, SECONDS ONLY, BEFORE THE ATTACK BEGAN AGAIN, THIS TIME A TWO-FISTED BEATING ON THE DOOR.

IT WOULD BE A SHORT TIME, A VERY SHORT TIME, BEFORE IT GAINED ACCESS. IT WAS STRONG, AND NOW FURIOUS, TOO.

HOW LONG BEFORE IT PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER, GAVE UP ON THE DOOR, AND MOVED TO THE WINDOW? THEY WERE LEAPED, BUT THAT WOULDN'T KEEP IT OUT FOR LONG. HE HAD MINUTES AT THE MOST, PROBABLY SECONDS, DEPENDING ON ITS BRAIN POWER.



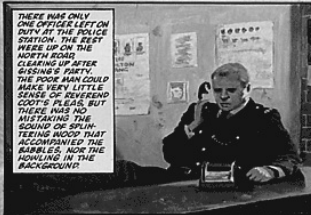
HIS MIND, LOOSED FROM RANHEAD'S GRASP, WAS A CHORUS OF FRAGMENTED PRAYERS AND DEMANDS.

BAM
BAM
BAM



IF I DIE, COOT FOUND HIMSELF THINKING, WILL I BE REWARDED IN HEAVEN FOR DYING MORE BRUTALLY THAN ANY COUNTRY VICAR MIGHT REASONABLY EXPECT? IS THERE COMPENSATION IN PARADISE FOR BEING DISMEMBERED IN THE FRONT HALL OF YOUR OWN VESTRY?

THERE WAS ONLY ONE OFFICER LEFT ON DUTY AT THE POLICE STATION. THE REST WERE UP ON THE NORTH ROAD, CLEARING UP AFTER GISSING'S PARTY. THE POOR MAN COULD MAKE VERY LITTLE SENSE OF REVEREND COOT'S PLEAS, BUT THERE WAS NO MISTAKING THE SOUND OF SPLINTERING WOOD THAT ACCOMPANIED THE BUBBLES, NOR THE HOWLING IN THE BACKGROUND.



THE PISTOL ON THE NORTH ROAD TOOK TWENTY, MAYBE TWENTY-FIVE SECONDS, TO ANSWER.



IN THAT TIME, RANHEAD HAD SMASHED THE CENTRAL PANEL OF THE VESTRY DOOR AND WAS NOW DEMOLISHING THE REST. NOT THAT THE POLICE KNEW THAT. AFTER THE SIGHTS THEY'D FACED--THE CHAUFFEUR'S CHARRED BODY, GISSING'S MISSING MANHOOD--THEY HAD BECOME INSOLENT WITH EXPERIENCE, LIKE HOUR-OLD WAR VETERANS.

IT TOOK THE OFFICER AT THE STATION A GOOD MINUTE TO CONVINCE THEM OF THE URGENCY IN COOT'S VOICE.



IN THAT TIME, RANHEAD HAD GAINED ACCESS.



SHAMEAD STOOD IN THE HALL OF THE VESTRY IN A CONFETTI OF SHATTERED WOOD. HIS TORSO WAS PRICKED WITH SPLINTERS, AND DOZENS OF TINY WOUNDS BLEED DOWN HIS HEAVY BULK. HIS BOOR SWEAT FERMENTED THE WALL LIKE INCENSE.

HE SNIFFED THE AIR FOR THE MAN. BUT HE WAS NOWHERE NEAR.



THE STUDY--THERE WAS WARMTH THERE, HIS NERVES COULD FEEL IT AT TWENTY YARDS, AND THERE WAS COMFORT, TOO.



WARMTH SURROUNDED HIM, HEALING, LIVING WARMTH. HE LUXURIATED IN THE SENSATION AS IT EMERGED HIS FACE, HIS LEAN BELLY, HIS LIMBS. HE FELT IT HEAT HIS BLOOD TOO, AND SO OTIR MEMORIES OF OTHER FIRES, FIRES HE'D SET IN FIELDS OF BURGEONING WHEAT.



AND HE RECALLED ANOTHER FIRE, THE MEMORY OF WHICH HIS MIND TRIED TO DOSSIE AND DUCK, BUT HE COULDN'T AVOID THINKING ABOUT IT: THE HUMILIATION OF THAT NIGHT WOULD BE WITH HIM FOREVER.

THEY'D PICKED THEIR SEASON SO CAREFULLY: HIGH SUMMER, AND NO RAIN IN TWO MONTHS. THE UNDERGROWTH OF THE WILD WOODS WAS TINDER DRY. EVEN THE LIVING TREE CAUGHT FLAME EASILY.



HE HAD BEEN FLUSHED OUT OF HIS FORTRESS WITH STREAMING EYES, CONFUSED AND FEARFUL, TO BE MET WITH SPIKES AND NETS ON EVERY SIDE, AND THAT...THING THEY HAD, THAT SIGHT THAT COULD SUBDUCE HIM.

OF COURSE THEY WEREN'T COURAGEOUS ENOUGH TO KILL HIM. THEY WERE TOO SUPERSTITIOUS FOR THAT. BESIDES, DIDN'T THEY RECOGNIZE HIS AUTHORITY, EVEN AS THEY WOUNDED HIM, THEIR TERROR AN HOMAGE TO IT?

SO THEY BURIED HIM ALIVE, AND THAT WAS WORSE THAN DEATH. WASN'T THAT THE VERY WORST? BECAUSE HE COULD LIVE AN AGE, AGES, AND NEVER DIE, NOT EVEN LOCKED IN THE EARTH. JUST LEFT TO WAIT A HUNDRED YEARS, AND SUFFER, AND ANOTHER HUNDRED AND ANOTHER, WHILE THE GENERATIONS PAUSED THE GROUND ABOVE HIS HEAD AND LIVED AND DIED AND FORGOT HIM.

PERHAPS THE WOMEN DIDN'T FORGET HIM. HE COULD SMELL THEM EVEN THROUGH THE EARTH, WHEN THEY CAME CLOSE TO HIS GRAVE, AND THOUGH THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE KNOWN IT, THEY FELT ANXIOUS, THEY PERSUADED THEIR MEN TO ABANDON THE PLACE ALTOGETHER, SO HE WAS LEFT ABSOLUTELY ALONE, WITH NOT EVEN A GLEANER FOR COMPANY.



LONELINESS WAS THEIR REVENGE ON HIM, HE THOUGHT, FOR THE TIMES HE AND HIS BROTHERS HAD TAKEN WOMEN INTO THE MOORS, SPREAD THEM OUT, SPIKED AND LOOSED THEM AGAIN, BLEEDING BUT FERTILE. THEY WOULD DIE HAVING THE CHILDREN OF THOSE RAPE, NO ROMAN'S ANATOMY COULD SURVIVE THE THRASHING OF A HYBRID, ITS TEETH, ITS ANGUISH. THAT WAS THE ONLY REVENGE HE AND HIS BROTHERS EVER HAD ON THE BIG-BELLIED SEX.



KANKEAP STROKED HIMSELF AND LOOKED UP AT A GILDED REPRODUCTION OF "THE LIGHT OF THE MOON" THAT HUNG ABOVE COOT'S MANTELPIECE. THE IMAGE WOKE NO TREMORS OF FEAR OR REVERENCE IN HIM. A SEXLESS MARTYR, DOE-EYED AND NO-BEYOND. NO CHALLENGE THERE.



THE TRUE POWER, THE ONLY POWER THAT COULD DEFEAT HIM, WAS APPARENTLY GONE. LOST BEYOND RECALL, ITS PLACE USURPED BY A VIRGIN SHEPHERD. HE EJACULATED SILENTLY. THE WORLD WAS HIS TO RULE UNCHALLENGED. HE WOULD HAVE WEALTH AND FOOD IN ABUNDANCE. BABIES EVEN. YES, BABYMEAT THAT WAS THE BEST. JUST-DROPPED MITES, STILL BLIND FROM THE WOMEN.

DANNHEAD STRETCHED, SIGHING IN ANTICIPATION OF THAT DELICACY HIS BRAIN AWASH WITH ATROCITIES.

FROM THE REFUGE IN THE CRYPT, COOT HEARD THE POLICE CARS SQUEALING TO A HALT OUTSIDE THE VESTRY, THEN THE SOUND OF FEET ON THE GRAVEL PATH. HE JUDGED THERE TO BE AT LEAST HALF A DOZEN.

IT WOULD BE ENOUGH, SURELY.

CAUTIOUSLY HE MOVED THROUGH THE DARKNESS TOWARD THE STAIRS.

DON'T GO NOW.

SHIT! IT'S ABOVE US.

I KNOW.

LET'S HAVE HIM COME DOWN HERE, SHALL WE? HE WANTS YOU, YOU KNOW. HE WANTS ME TO--

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU?!



I THINK HE MIGHT WANT TO BAPTIZE YOU, TOO. HOW'D YOU LIKE THAT? LIKE THAT, WOULD YOU? HE PISSed ON ME-- YOU SEE HIM? AND THAT WASN'T ALL. OH, NO, HE WANTS MORE THAN THAT. HE WANTS EVERYTHING. HEAR ME? EVERYTHING.

COME WITH ME.

I PUT MY TRUST IN GOD.

HE IS GOD. HE WAS HERE BEFORE THIS FUCKING SHITHOUSE WAS BUILT, YOU KNOW THAT?

SO WERE DOGS. DOESN'T MEAN I'LL LET THEM COCK THEIR LEGS ON ME.

CLEVER OLD FUCKER, AREN'T YOU? HE'LL SHOW YOU. YOU'LL CHANGE.

NO, DECLAN. LET GO OF ME--

COME ON UP THE STAIRS, FUCKFACE. MUSTN'T KEEP GOD WAITING.

WORDS, ALL LOGICAL ARGUMENT, ELUPED COOT. WAS THERE NOTHING HE COULD SAY TO MAKE THE MAN SEE HIS DEGRADATION?



THEY MADE AN UNGAINLY ENTRANCE INTO THE CHURCH, AND COOT AUTOMATICALLY LOOKED TOWARD THE ALTAR, HOPING FOR SOME REASSURANCE.

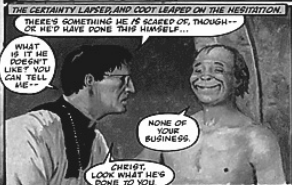
HE GOT NONE. THE ALTAR HAD BEEN DESECRATED.

YOU DID THIS?

HE WANTS ME TO DESTROY IT ALL. TAKE IT APART STONE BY STONE IF I HAVE TO.

HE WOULDN'T DARE.

OH, HE'D DARE. HE'S NOT SCARED OF JESUS. HE'S NOT SCARED OF...



WHAT IS IT HE DOESN'T LIKE? YOU CAN TELL ME--

THE CERTAINTY LAPSED, AND COOT LEAPED ON THE HESITATION. THERE'S SOMETHING HE IS SCARED OF, THOUGH-- OR HE'D HAVE DONE THIS HIMSELF...

NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.

CHRIST, LOOK WHAT HE'S DONE TO YOU.



I KNOW MY MASTER WHEN I SEE HIM... AND SO WILL YOU.

JESUS GOD...

FOR THE FIRST TIME, COOT SAW RAINHEAD IN A GOOD LIGHT, AND THE TERRORS BEGAN IN EARNEST. HE HAD AVOIDED THINKING TOO MUCH OF ITS SIZE, ITS STARE, ITS ORGANS. NOW, AS IT CAME TOWARDS HIM WITH SLOW, EVEN STATEDLY STEPS, HIS HEART CONCEDED ITS MASTERY.

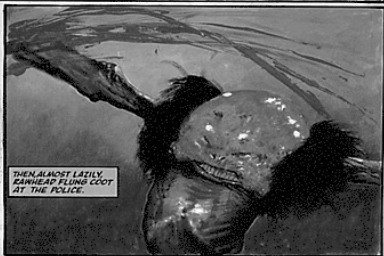


IT WAS NO MORE BEAST, DESPITE ITS MANE AND ITS AWESOME ARRAY OF TEETH; ITS EYES LANCED HIM THROUGH AND THROUGH, GLEANING WITH A DEPTH OF CONTEMPT NO ANIMAL COULD EVER MUSTER.



THERE WERE SEVEN OFFICERS, NOT SIX AS COOT HAD GUESSED. THREE OF THEM WERE ARMED THEIR WEAPONS BROUGHT DOWN FROM LONDON ON ORDER OF DETECTIVE SERGEANT GISSING. THE LATE, SOON-TO-BE-DECORATED-POSTHUMOUSLY, DETECTIVE SERGEANT GISSING.







HIS INSTINCT WAS TO FLY IN THE FACE OF THESE POPPING, FLASHING EYES. BUT THE PAIN WAS TOO MUCH.

INSTEAD HE MADE HIS RETREAT.

THERE WERE COPIES HE KNEW, RUEROWS AND CAVES, WHERE HE COULD HIDE, FIND TIME TO THINK THIS NEW PROBLEM THROUGH, BUT FIRST HE HAD TO ELUDE THEM.



THEY WERE AFTER HIM QUICKLY, FLURRIED WITH THE EASE OF THEIR VICTORY, LEAVING HIMSIDE TO FIND A WARE ON ONE OF THE GRAVES, EMPTY ITS CHRYSANTHEMUMS, AND BE SICK.



OUT OF THE DYE THERE WERE NO LIGHTS ALONG THE ROAD, AND RAINHEAD BEGAN TO FEEL SAFER. HE COULD MELT INTO THE DARKNESS, INTO THE EARTH--HE'D DONE IT A THOUSAND TIMES.

AT HIS BACK, HIS PURSUERS WERE ALREADY LOSING THE CHASE.



HE CUT ACROSS A FIELD.

THE ENEMY WAS SHOUTING A CONFUSION OF ORDERS, WORDS RAINHEAD DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. NO MATTER, HE KNEW WHEN THEY WERE EARLY FRIGHTENED. THEY WOULD NOT LOOK FAR FOR HIM TONIGHT, THEY'D USE THE DARKNESS AS AN EXCUSE TO CALL OFF THE SEARCH, TELLING THEMSELVES THAT HIS WOUNDS WERE PROBABLY FATAL ANYHOW, TRUSTING CHILDREN THAT THEY WERE.



HIS ENEMIES WERE RETURNING TO THEIR HOMES, AS HE'D KNOWN THEY WOULD. THE CHASE WAS OVER FOR THE NIGHT.

HE LAY DOWN ON THE EARTH AND WATCHED A METEOR BURN UP AS IT FELL TO THE SOUTHWEST. IT WAS A BRIEF, BRIGHT STREAK WHICH EDGELIT A CLOUD, THEN WENT OUT.

MORNING WAS MANY LONG, HEALING HOURS IN THE FUTURE. HE WOULD SOON BE STRONG AGAIN...AND THEN, THEN--

HE'D BURN THEM ALL AWAY.

COOT WAS NOT DEAD, BUT SO CLOSE TO DEATH IT SCARCELY MADE ANY DIFFERENCE. EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE BONES IN HIS BODY WERE FRACTURED OR BROKEN; HIS FACE AND NECK WERE A MAZE OF LACERATIONS; ONE OF HIS HANDS WAS CRUSHED ALMOST BEYOND RECOGNITION. HE WOULD CERTAINLY DIE. IT WAS PURELY A MATTER OF TIME AND INCLINATION.

I WANT US ALL TO GO BACK TO LONDON.

A DAY AGO YOU WANTED US TO STAY HERE... GET TO BE PART OF THE COMMUNITY.

IN THE VILLAGE, THOSE WHO HAD GLIMPSED SO MUCH AS A FRAGMENT OF THE EVENTS IN THE DIP WERE ALREADY ELABORATING ON THEIR STORIES. WHATEVER HAD HAPPENED THAT SUNDAY NIGHT, IT WAS GOING TO TAKE A LONG TIME TO FORGET.

THERE WOULD BE NO HARVEST FESTIVAL SERVICE.

THAT WAS ON FRIDAY, BEFORE ALL THIS... THIS... THERE'S A MANIAC LOOSE, RON.

IF WE GO NOW, WE WON'T COME BACK.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? OF COURSE WE'LL COME BACK.

THAT'S RIDICULOUS.

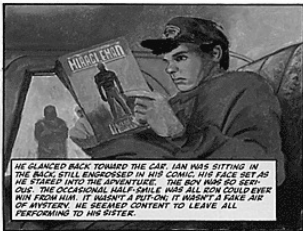
YOU WERE THE ONE WHO WAS SO KEEN ON US BEING VISIBLE, BEING SEEN TO JOIN IN VILLAGE LIFE. WELL, WE'LL HAVE TO JOIN IN THE DEATHS, TOO, AND I'M GOING TO STAY--SEE IT THROUGH. YOU CAN GO BACK TO LONDON. TAKE THE KIDS.

NO.

I WANT TO SEE HIM CAUGHT, WHOEVER HE IS. I WANT TO KNOW IT'S ALL BEEN CLEARED UP. SEE IT WITH MY OWN EYES. THAT'S THE ONLY WAY WE'LL EVER FEEL SAFE HERE.

RELUCTANTLY, SHE NODDED.

IF WE LEAVE ONCE THE PLACE IS THREATENED, WE GIVE UP ON IT ALTOGETHER.



BEHIND THE HEDGE, PERRIE
PULLED DOWN HER SUNDAY
KNICKERS AND SQUATTED.
BUT AFTER ALL THE FUSS,
HER PEE WOULDN'T COME.

COME
ON,
LOVE.

THE FIELD BEYOND
THE IRON GATE
HAD ALREADY
HARVESTED IT.
SMELT... EARTHY.



MAGGIE LOOKED AT HIM ACCUSINGLY,
AS THOUGH HE'D PUT THE DAMN THING
THERE WITH MALICE, AFORETHOUGHT.

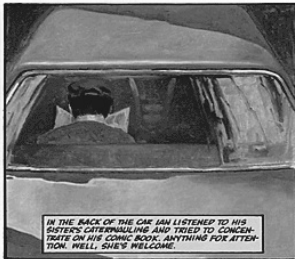
OH, GOD,
RON.



WHAT'S
WRONG, FOR GOD'S
SAKE?

WHAT'S
HAPPENED?

IT'S ALL
RIGHT... IT'S ALL
RIGHT.



IN THE BACK OF THE CAR JAN LISTENED TO HIS
SISTER'S CATERNAULING AND TRIED TO CONCENTRATE
ON HIS COMIC BOOK. ANYTHING FOR ATTENTION.
WELL, SHE'S WELCOME.



SUPPERLY, IT WENT DARK.

AT HIS SHOULDER, SIX INCHES AWAY FROM
HIM, SOMETHING STOOD TO PEER INTO
THE CAR. ITS FACE LIKE HELL.

HE COULDN'T SCREAM.
HIS TONGUE REFUSED
TO MOVE.



ALL THE BOY COULD DO WAS FLOOD THE SEAT AND KICK USELESSLY AS THE LONG, SCARRED ARMS REACHED THROUGH THE WINDOW TOWARD HIM.

THE NAILS OF THE BEAST GOUGED HIS ANKLES, TORE HIS SOCK. ONE OF HIS NEW SHOES FELL OFF IN THE STRUGGLE.



NOW IT HAD HIS FOOT AND HE WAS BEING DRAGGED ACROSS THE WET SEAT TOWARD THE WINDOW. HE FOUND HIS VOICE. NOT QUITE HIS VOICE... A PATHETIC, A SILLY-SOUNDING VOICE. NOT AT ALL THE EQUAL OF THE MORTAL TERROR HE FELT.

AND IT WAS TOO LATE ANYWAY.



HE LOOKED THROUGH THE BACK WINDOW AS IT HAULED HIS TORSO INTO THE OPEN AIR, AND IN A DREAM HE SAW DADDY AT THE GATE, HIS FACE LOOKING SO, SO RIDICULOUS. HE WAS CLIMBING THE GATE, COMING TO HELP, COMING TO SAVE HIM, BUT HE WAS FAR TOO SLOW.



IAN KNEW HE WAS BEYOND SALVATION FROM THE BEGINNING BECAUSE HE'D DIED THIS WAY IN HIS SLEEP ON A HUNDRED OCCASIONS, AND DADDY NEVER GOT THERE IN TIME.



THE MOUTH WAS WIPER EVEN THAN HE'D DREAMED IT. A HOLE WHICH HE WAS BEING DELIVERED INTO, HEAD FIRST. IT SMELLED LIKE THE PUMPSTERS BEHIND THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA, TIMES A MILLION.





HE WAS SICK DOWN
ITS THROAT, AS IT
BIT HIS HEAD OFF.



RAINHEAD HEARD THE CRY AND TURNED,
WITHOUT A TRACE OF FEAR ON HIS FACE,
TO LOOK AT THE SOURCE.



IT WAS MAGGIE WHO
BROKE ITS HOLD, HER
VOICE A DIRGE.



OH...
PLEASE...
NO.

RON HAD NEVER SCREAMED IN HIS
LIFE, THE SCREAM HAD ALWAYS
BELONGED TO THE OTHER SEX
UNTIL THAT INSTANT. THEN,
WATCHING THE MONSTER STAND
UP AND CLOSE ITS JAW AROUND
HIS SON, THERE WAS NO SOUND
APPROPRIATE BUT A SCREAM.

THEIR EYES MET. THE KING'S GLANCE
PENETRATED RON LIKE A SPIKE,
FREEZING HIM TO THE ROAD AND TO
THE MARROW.



RON SHOOK RAINHEAD'S LOOK FROM HIS HEAD AND STARTED TOWARDS THE CAR, TOWARDS HIS SON. BUT THE HESITATION HAD GIVEN RAINHEAD A MOMENT'S GRACE HE SCARCELY NEEDED ANYWAY, AND HE WAS ALREADY AWAY, HIS CATCH CLAMPED BETWEEN HIS JAWS, SPILLING OUT TO RIGHT AND LEFT.



THE BREEZE CARRIED MOTES OF IAN'S BLOOD BACK TOWARD RON. HE FELT THEM SPOT HIS FACE IN A GENTLE SHOWER.



LOOKING UP AT THE BLACK BULK OF THE MONSTER AS IT RAINED FISS ON HIM, HE'D FOUND THE PUREST JOY. IF THAT EXPERIENCE, WHICH WOULD ONCE HAVE DISGUSTED HIM, COULD BE SO CONSUMMATE. WHAT MIGHT DEATH BE LIKE? RATER STILL. AND IF HE COULD CONTINUE TO DIE BY RAINHEAD'S HAND, WOULDN'T THAT BE THE RAREST OF THE RARE?



HE LOOKED AT THE ALTAR AND THE REMAINS OF THE FIRES THE POLICE HAD EXTINGUISHED. THEY'D SEARCHED FOR HIM AFTER COOT'S DEATH, BUT HE HAD A DOZEN HIDING PLACES THEY WOULD NEVER FIND, AND THEY'D SOON GIVEN UP.

DECLAN STOOD IN THE CHANCEL OF ST PETER'S AND LISTENED FOR THE HUM. IT WAS STILL THERE. SOONER OR LATER HE'D HAVE TO GO TO THE SOURCE OF THAT SOUND AND DESTROY IT, EVEN IF IT MEANT, AS IT WELL MIGHT, HIS OWN DEATH.

BUT THAT WAS FAR FOR THE COURSE, AND THE THOUGHT OF DEATH DIDN'T DISTRESS HIM. FAR FROM IT. IN THE LAST FEW DAYS HE'D REALIZED AMBITIONS THAT HE'D NURTURED (UNSPOKEN, EVEN UNTHOUGHT) FOR YEARS.



WE'VE DRAFTED MEN FROM EVERY DIVISION WITHIN FIFTY MILES, MR. MILTON. THE HILLS ARE BEING SCOUTED. WE'LL HAVE IT, WHATEVER IT IS.

IT TOOK MY CHILD. YOU UNDERSTAND ME? IT KILLED HIM, IN FRONT OF ME--

RON MILTON WAS TASTING TEARS, AND IT WAS A TASTE HE'D FORGOTTEN. IT WAS MANY YEARS SINCE HE'D WEPT, ESPECIALLY IN FRONT OF OTHER MEN. BUT HE DIDN'T CARE ANY LONGER. THESE MISTARD FOX LITEN WEREN'T HUMAN ANYWAY. THEY JUST LOOKED AT HIM, WHILE HE Poured OUT HIS STORY, AND NODDED LIKE IDIOTS.

THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO APPRECIATE THE HORROR OF IT ALL.

THERE ARE PEOPLE COMING FROM THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. WE CAN'T DO MUCH MORE 'TIL THEY'VE HAD A LOOK AT THE EVIDENCE. IT'S ALL PUBLIC MONEY, SIR.

YOU FUCKING IDIOT! WHAT DOES IT MATTER WHAT IT COSTS TO KILL IT? IT'S NOT HUMAN. IT'S OUT OF HELL!

IF IT CAME OUT OF HELL, SIR, I DON'T THINK IT WOULD HAVE FOUND THE REVEREND COOT SUCH EASY PICKINGS.

HE MUST GET TO COOT.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR WIFE?

THERE WAS NO... COULD DO FOR THEM NOW - I LEAVE THEM SLEEPING IN THE SIDE ROOM, DUMB WITH REGRET.

HE MUST GET TO COOT BEFORE HE DIES.

WE'RE DOING WHAT WE CAN.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH. THIS THING... IT'S NOT HUMAN.

WANDER KNEW BLOODY WELL HOW UNHUMAN IT WAS.

COOT--THAT WAS HIS MAN. WHY HADN'T HE THOUGHT OF THAT BEFORE? COOT.

RON HAD NEVER BEEN MUCH OF A MAN OF GOD, BUT HE WAS PREPARED TO BE OPEN MINDED. HE'D BELIEVE ANYTHING, ANYTHING AT ALL, IF IT GAVE HIM A WEAPON AGAINST THE DEVIL.

HE'D KNOW, WHATEVER REVERENDS KNOW, AND HE'D UNDERSTAND THE PAIN BETTER THAN THOSE MONKEYS. DEAD SONS WERE THE CRUX OF THE CHURCH, AFTER ALL.

FOR A MOMENT HE SMELLED HIS SON, THE BOY WHO WOULD HAVE CARRIED HIS NAME, THE BOY WHO WAS HIS SPERM MADE FLESH. THE QUIET CHILD WHO'D LOOKED OUT OF THE CAR AT HIM WITH SUCH RESIGNATION IN HIS EYES.

THIS TIME THE TEARS DIDN'T BEGIN. THIS TIME THERE WAS JUST AN ANGER THAT WAS ALMOST WONDERFUL.



IT WAS HALF PAST ELEVEN AT NIGHT. RAINHEAD REX
LAY UNDER THE MOON IN ONE OF THE HARVESTED FIELDS
TO THE SOUTHWEST OF THE NICHOLSON FARM.

THE STURBLE WAS DARKENING NOW,
AND THERE WAS A TANTALIZING SMELL
OF ROTTING VEGETABLE MATTER OFF
THE EARTH. BESIDE HIM LAY HIS
PINNER, IAN RONALD MILTON.

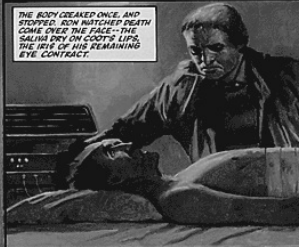
HERE, BATHING IN THE FULL MOON'S
SILVER, STRETCHING HIS LIMBS AND
EATING THE FLESH OF HUMANKIND,
HE FELT IRRESISTIBLE. HIS FINGERS
PREEN A KIDNEY OFF THE PLATE
BESIDE HIM, AND HE SWALLOWED
IT WHOLE.

SNEET.



IT TOOK MY SON. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE THING? PLEASE TELL ME. I'LL BELIEVE WHATEVER YOU TELL ME... JUST EXPLAIN.

COOT WAS AWAKE, DESPITE THE SEPARATION. HE KNEW HE WAS DYING, AND THE TIME WAS TOO PRECIOUS TO DOZE THROUGH. HE DIDN'T KNOW THE NAME OF THE FACE THAT WAS INTER-ROGATING HIM IN THE GLOOM OF THE ROOM, BUT THE VOICE WAS SO POLITELY INSISTENT HE HAD TO LISTEN. EVEN THOUGH IT INTERRUPTED HIS PEACEMAKING WITH GOD. BESIDES, THEY HAD QUESTIONS IN COMMON, AND THEY ALL CIRCLED THOSE QUESTIONS, ON THE BEAST THAT HAD REJECTED HIM TO THIS PULP.



THE BODY CREAKED ONCE, AND STOPPED. RON WATCHED DEATH COME OVER THE FACE--THE SALIVA DRY ON COOT'S LIPS, THE IRIS OF HIS REMAINING EYE CONTRACT.

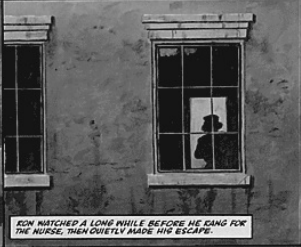


TIME AND AGAIN, AS HE'D LAID ON THAT HOT PILLOW, CONFUSED THOUGHTS HAD RACED THROUGH COOT'S MIND: DECLAIR'S BAPTISM; THE EMBRACE OF THE BEAST; THE ALTAR, HIS HAIR RISING AND HIS FLESH, TOO. MAYBE THERE WAS SOMETHING. HE COULD TELL THE FATHER AT HIS BEDSIDE.

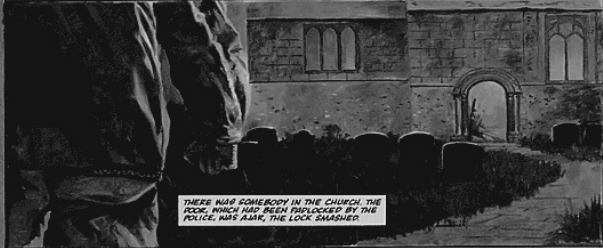
...IN THE CHURCH... THE ALTAR... IT'S AFRAID... THE ALTAR...

YOU MEAN THE CROSS? IT'S AFRAID OF THE CROSS?

NO... NOT... NOT--



RON WATCHED A LONG WHILE BEFORE HE RANG FOR THE NURSE, THEN QUIETLY MADE HIS ESCAPE.



THERE WAS SOMEBODY IN THE CHURCH. THE DOOR, WHICH HAD BEEN PADLOCKED BY THE POLICE, WAS ASKED, THE LOCK SMASHED.



YOU'VE GOT
NO RIGHT TO BE
IN HERE--



WHAT
CAN I
DO FOR
YOU?

I CAME

I ASKED
YOU A FRIGGING
QUESTION. WHAT
DO YOU WANT?

WHAT TO TELL THIS MAN...
THE TRUTH. NO, THERE WAS
SOMETHING WRONG HERE.



I THOUGHT
ANYONE COULD
COME INTO A
CHURCH.

NOT TONIGHT.
YOU GET THE FUCK
OUT OF HERE.

YOU GET
THE FUCK OUT.
I SAID!

RON KEPT WALKING.



YOU'VE BEEN TALKING TO
COOTY! WHAT DID THE OLD WANKER
TELL YOU? IT'S ALL A LIE, WHATEVER
IT WAS! HE NEVER TOLD THE TRUTH
IN HIS FRIGGING LIFE. YOU KNOW
THAT? YOU TAKE IT FROM ME. HE
USED TO GET UP THERE AND
TELL FUCKING LIES!

I WANT TO SEE
THE ALTAR FOR MYSELF.
WE'LL SEE IF HE WAS
TELLING LIES--

NO YOU
WONT!



RON WAS SURPRISED AT THE
WEAKNESS OF HIS OWN ARMS.



WHY HADN'T HE PLAYED SQUASH THE
WAY MAGGIE HAD SUGGESTED? WHY
WERE HIS ARMS SO INEFFECTUAL?



IF HE WASN'T CAREFUL, THIS MAN
WAS GOING TO KILL HIM.



SUDDENLY A LIGHT, SO BRIGHT IT COULD HAVE BEEN A
MIDNIGHT DAWN, SPLASHED THROUGH THE WEST WINDOW.
A CLOUD OF SCREAMS FOLLOWED CLOSE ON IT FIRELIGHT,
SMOKING THE BONFIRE ON THE ALTAR STEPS, DYED
THE AIR. THE STAINED GLASS DANCED.



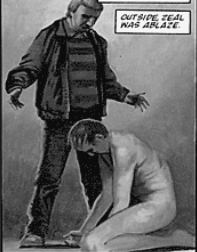
DECLAN FORGOT HIS VICTIM FOR
AN INSTANT, AND RON RALLIED.



IT WASN'T ENOUGH TO SEE THE BASTARD'S
NOSE BLEED OR TO HEAR THE CARTILAGE
MAHED--RON KEPT BEATING AND
BEATING UNTIL HIS FIST BLED.



ONLY THEN DID HE
LET DECLAN DROP.



OUTSIDE, ZEAL
WAS ABLAZE.

RAINHEAD HAD MADE FIRES BEFORE, MANY FIRES. BUT PETROL WAS A NEW WEAPON, AND HE WAS STILL GETTING THE HANG OF IT. IT DIDN'T TAKE HIM LONG TO LEARN. THE TRICK WAS TO WOUND THE WHEELED FOXES, OPEN THEIR FLANKS, AND CUT THEIR BLOOD WOULD POZE, BLOOD THAT MADE HIS HEAD ACHE.



THE ROLLS WERE EASY PREY, LINED UP ON THE PAVEMENT LIKE BULLOCKS TO BE SLAUGHTERED.

IN MINUTES, ZEAL WAS BURNING FROM END TO END.



IN ST. PETER'S, RON DRAGGED THE FILTHIED CLOTH OFF THE ALTAR, TRYING TO BLOCK OUT ALL THOUGHTS OF FERRIE AND MARGARET. THE POLICE WOULD MOVE THEM TO A PLACE OF SAFETY, FOR CERTAIN.

THE ISSUE AT HAND MUST TAKE PRECEDENCE.

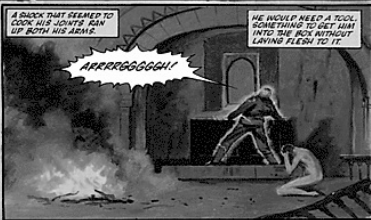


OUTSIDE, THE BEAST WAS LOOSE. HE COULD HEAR ITS TRIUMPHANT ROARS, AND HE FELT EAGER, YES, EAGER, TO GO TO IT.



TO KILL IT OR BE KILLED.

BUT FIRST THE BOX. IT CONTAINED POWER, NO DOUBT ABOUT THAT, A POWER THAT WAS EVEN NOW RAISING THE HAIRS ON HIS HEAD, THAT WAS WORKING AT HIS COCK, GIVING HIM AN ACHING HARD-ON. HIS FLESH SEEMED TO SEEK THE WITH IT... IT ELATED HIM LIKE LOVE.



A SHOCK THAT SEEMED TO COOK HIS JOINTS RAN UP BOTH HIS ARMS.

HE WOULD NEED A TOOL, SOMETHING TO GET HIM INTO THE BOX WITHOUT LAYING FLESH TO IT.

ARRRRGGGGG!!



THERE WAS A WEAPON HERE: A FEW INCHES AWAY FROM HIM, IF HE COULD ONLY GET TO IT, TO WIELD IT. HIS ERECTION THROBBED, HIS BALLS THROBLED.

COME TO ME.
COME ON, COME ON.
COME TO ME.
COME TO ME.

HE WILLED IT INTO HIS EMBRACE, THIS TREASURE, AS IF IT WERE A GIRL HE WANTED, HIS HARD-ON WANTED, AND HE WAS HYPNOTIZING HER INTO HIS BED.



THE ALTAR WAS HOLLOW, AS HE'D KNOWN IT WOULD BE.

AND EMPTY.

EMPTY.

EXCEPT FOR A BALL OF STONE, THE SIZE OF A SMALL FOOTBALL, WAS THIS HIS PRIZE? HE COULDN'T BELIEVE HOW INSIGNIFICANT IT LOOKED, AND YET THE AIR WAS STILL ELECTRIC AROUND HIM; HIS BLOOD STILL DANCED.



OUTSIDE, RAINHEAD WAS JUBILATING.

IMAGES FLASHED BEFORE DREW'S EYES AS HE WEIGHED THE STONE IN HIS DEADENED HAND: A CORPSE WITH ITS FEET BURNING; A FLAMING COYOTE, A DOG, RUNNING ALONG THE STREET; A LIVING BALL OF FIRE. IT WAS ALL OUTSIDE, WAITING TO UNFOLD.

AGAINST THE PERPETRATOR, HE HAD THIS STONE.



HE'D TRUSTED GOD JUST FOR HALF A DAY, AND HE GOT SHIT ON. IT WAS JUST A STONE. JUST A FUCKING STONE.



WAS IT MEANT TO BE SOMETHING, PERHAPS? WAS HE MISSING ITS DEEPER SIGNIFICANCE?



THERE WAS A KNOT OF NOISE AT THE OTHER END OF THE CHURCH-- A CRASH, A CRY, FROM BEYOND THE DOOR, A WOODSH OF FLAME.

HE'S BURNING THE VILLAGE.

CHRIST IN HEAVEN HELP US.

IT WAS THE RENIGN POLICEMAN WHO WOULDN'T BELIEVED IN HELL AND MRS. BLATTER FROM THE HOTEL AND DIDN'T SEEM TO KNOW SHE WAS NAKED. DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE SHE WAS.



THERE'S NO FUCKING CHRIST IN HERE.



KON STARED AT MRS. BLATTER'S BODY, ENTRANCED.

SHE WAS CONSIDERABLY OVERWEIGHT, HER BREASTS GAGGING, HER BELLY OVERSHADOWING HER CUNT SO HE DOUBTED IF SHE COULD EVEN SEE IT, BUT IT WAS FOR THIS HIS COCKHEAD THROBBED FOR THIS HIS HEAD REELED.



HER IMAGE WAS IN HIS HANDS, GOD, YES, SHE WAS THERE IN HIS HANDS, SHE WAS THE LIVING EQUIVALENT OF WHAT HE HELD.

A WOMAN.

THE STONE WAS A STATUE OF A WOMAN, A VENUS GROSSER THAN MRS. BLATTER, HER BELLY SWELLING WITH CHILDREN, TITS LIKE MOUNTAINS, CUNT A VALLEY THAT BEGAN AT HER NAVEL AND GAZED TO THE WORLD. ALL THIS TIME, UNDER THE CLOTH AND THE CROSS, THEY'D BOWED THEIR HEADS TO A GODDESS.



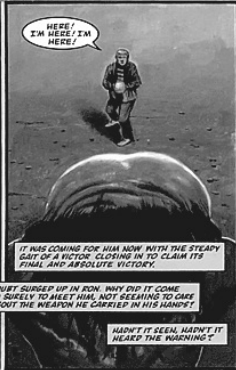


RON HELD THE VENUS TIGHT, FEELING HER WEIGHT IN HIS HANDS AND TAKING SECURITY FROM HER.

BEHIND HIM, DECLAN THE VERGER WAS SCREECHING A WARNING TO HIS LORD.



DARKHEAD, SILHOUETTED AGAINST A PANORAMA OF FLAMES, LOOKED AROUND...PERHAPS BECAUSE IT HEARD THE WARNING THE VERGER WAS YELLING, BUT MORE LIKELY BECAUSE IT KNEW, KNEW WITHOUT BEING TOLD, THAT THE WOMAN HAD BEEN FOUND.



IT WAS COMING FOR HIM NOW, WITH THE STEADY GAIT OF A VICTOR, CLOSING IN TO CLAIM ITS FINAL AND ABSOLUTE VICTORY.

DOUBT SURGED UP IN RON. WHY DID IT COME SO SURELY TO MEET HIM, NOT SEEMING TO CARE ABOUT THE WEAPON HE CARRIED IN HIS HAND?

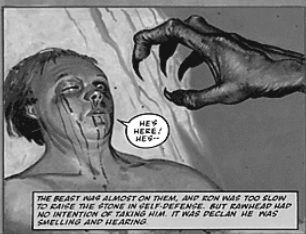
HADN'T IT SEEN, HADN'T IT HEARD THE WARNING?



UNLESS--

OH, GOD IN HEAVEN

--UNLESS COOT HAD BEEN WRONG. UNLESS IT WAS ONLY A STONE HE HELD IN HIS HAND, A USELESS, MEANINGLESS LUMP OF STONE.



THE BEAST WAS ALMOST ON THEM, AND RON WAS TOO SLOW TO RAISE THE STONE IN SELF-DEFENSE. BUT RANHEAD HAD NO INTENTION OF TAKING HIM. IT WAS DECLAR HE WAS SMELLING AND HEARING.



THE FLAMES HAD ROASTED ITS EYEBALLS, AND THEY SWAM IN A SUM OF MUCUS AND TEARS.

BUT IT MUST SEE NOW. IT MUST.

HIS DAMMED EYES FOUND THE STONE. THE MONO SAPIEN WAS NURSING IT LIKE A BABY. IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR RANHEAD TO SEE CLEARLY, BUT HE KNEW. IT ACHED IN HIS MIND THAT IMAGE IT PRICKED HIM, IT TEASED HIM.

SLOWLY, CAUTIOUSLY, THE ZEALOTS GATHERED THEIR COURAGE AND CAME OUT FROM HIDING.

IT WAS JUST A SYMBOL, OF COURSE, A SIGN OF POWER, NOT THE POWER ITSELF. BUT HIS MIND AWOKE NO DISTINCTION. TO HIM THE STONE WAS THE THING HE FEARED MOST-- THE BLEEDING WOMAN, HER GAPPING HOLE, EATING SEED AND SPITTING CHILDREN. IT WAS LIFE, THAT HOLE, THAT WOMAN. IT WAS ENDLESS FECUNDITY-- AND IT TERRIFIED HIM.

RAINHEAD STEPPED BACK, HIS DAIN SHIT RUNNING FREELY DOWN HIS LEG. THE FEAR ON HIS FACE GAVE RON STRENGTH. HE PRESSED HOME HIS ADVANTAGE, DIMLY AWARE THAT VANNHOE WAS RALLYING ALLIES AROUND HIM.

GO ON...GO ON, TAKE HIM... TAKE HIM...

THEY BEGAN TO CLOSE IN, EVEN BEFORE HE FINISHED SPEAKING

PANIC OVERCAME RAINHEAD'S SUPERSTITIONS FOR ONE MOMENT...

...AND THEN HUMAN HANDS, WEAK, WHITE HUMAN HANDS WERE LAID ON RAINHEAD'S BODY.

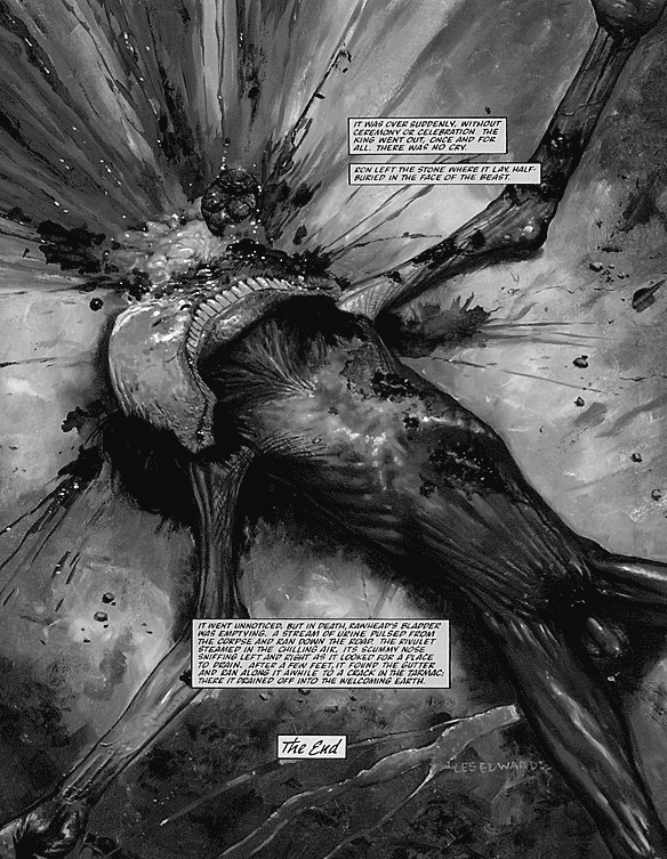
IN RAINHEAD'S ROASTED EYES THE STARS REELED AS HE FELL BACKWARDS ON THE ROAD.

HE SNIFFED OFF A FINGER HERE, A FACE THERE, BUT THEY WOULD NOT BE STOPPED NOW. THEIR HATRED WAS DEEP--IN THEIR BONES, DID THEY BUT KNOW IT.

HE THRASHED UNDER THEIR ASSAULT FOR AS LONG AS HE COULD, BUT HE KNEW DEATH WAS CERTAIN. THERE WOULD BE NO RESURRECTION THIS TIME, NO WAITING IN THE EARTH FOR AN AGE UNTIL THEIR DESCENDANTS FORGOT HIM. HE'D BE SNIFFED OUT ARSOLUTELY, AND THERE WOULD BE NOTHINGNESS.

HE LOOKED UP AS BEST HE COULD TO WHERE THE LITTLE FATHER WAS STANDING. THEIR EYES MET, AS THEY HAD ON THE ROAD WHEN HE'D TAKEN THE BOY. BUT NOW RAINHEAD'S LOOK HAD LOST ITS POWER TO TRANSFIX.

HIS FACE WAS EMPTY AND STERILE AS THE MOON.



IT WAS OVER SUDDENLY, WITHOUT CEREMONY OR CELEBRATION THE KING WENT OUT, ONCE AND FOR ALL. THERE WAS NO CRY.

KON LEFT THE STONE WHERE IT LAY, HALF-BURIED IN THE FACE OF THE BEAST.

IT WENT UNNOTICED, BUT IN DEATH, KANHEAD'S BLADDER WAS EMPTYING. A STREAM OF URINE PULSED FROM THE CORPSE AND RAN DOWN THE ROCK. THE RIVULET STEAMED IN THE CHILLING AIR. ITS SCUMMY NOSE SNIFFING LEFT AND RIGHT AS IT LOOKED FOR A PLACE TO DRINK. AFTER A FEW FEET, IT FOUND THE GUTTER AND RAN ALONG IT UNTIL TO A CRACK IN THE TARMAC. THERE IT POINED OFF INTO THE WELCOMING EARTH.

The End

LES ELWARD



BEFORE THE WALL
CAME DOWN.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF MIROSENKO
WHICH BALLARD HAD BEEN SHOWN
IN MUNICH HAD PROVED FAR FROM
INSTRUCTIVE. ONLY ONE OR TWO
PICTURED THE KGB MAN FULL-
FACED; AND OF THE OTHERS,
MOST WERE BLURRED AND GRAINY,
BETRAYING THEIR FURTIVE ORIGINS.

BALLARD WAS NOT OVERMUCH CONCERNED.

EIN
BRÜDE



HE KNEW FROM LONG AND
OCCASIONALLY BITTER
EXPERIENCE THAT THE
EYE WAS ALL TOO READY
TO BE DECEIVED; BUT
THERE WERE OTHER
FACULTIES-- THE REMNANTS
OF SENSES MODERN LIFE
HAD RENDERED OBSOLETE--
WHICH HE HAD LEARNED TO
CALL INTO PLAY, ENABLING
HIM TO SNIFF OUT
BETRAYAL.



TWILIGHT

AT THE TOWERS

THESE WERE THE TALENTS HE WOULD USE WHEN HE MET MIROSENKO. WITH THEM, HE COULD ROOT THE TRUTH FROM THE MAN.

THE TRUTH? THEREIN LAY THE CONUNDRUM. FOR IN THIS CONTEXT, WASN'T SINCERITY A MOVABLE FEAST? SERGEI ZAKHAROVICH MIROSENKO HAD BEEN A SECTION LEADER IN DIRECTORATES OF THE KGB FOR ELEVEN YEARS WITH ACCESS TO THE MOST PRIVILEGED INFORMATION ON THE DISPERSAL OF SOVIET ILLEGALS IN THE WEST.



IN RECENT WEEKS, HOWEVER, MIROZENKO HAD MADE HIS DISENCHANTMENT WITH HIS PRESENT MASTERS, AND HIS CONSEQUENT DESIRE TO PERFECT, KNOWN TO THE BRITISH SECURITY SERVICE. IN RETURN FOR ELABORATE EFFORTS WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE ON HIS BEHALF, HE HAD VOLUNTEERED TO ACT AS AN AGENT WITHIN THE KGB FOR A PERIOD OF THREE MONTHS, AFTER WHICH HE WOULD BE TAKEN INTO THE BOSOM OF DEMOCRACY AND HIDDEN WHERE HIS VENGEFUL OVERLORDS WOULD NEVER FIND HIM.

IT HAD FALLEN TO BALLARD TO MEET THE RUSSIAN FACE-TO-FACE, IN THE HOPE OF ESTABLISHING WHETHER MIROZENKO'S DISAFFECTION FROM HIS IDEOLOGY WAS REAL OR FAKED. THE ANSWER WOULD NOT BE FOUND ON MIROZENKO'S LIPS, BUT IN SOME BEHAVIORAL NUANCE WHICH ONLY INSTINCT WOULD COMPREHEND.

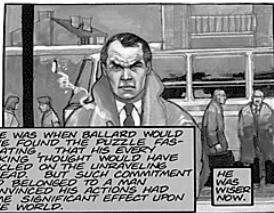
UM
ER
CH WIE EIN WALD



FREE DEUTSCHLAND



ph.



TIME WAS WHEN BALLARD WOULD HAVE FOUND THE PUZZLE FASCINATING THAT HIS EVERY WAKING THOUGHT WOULD HAVE CIRCLED ON THE UNRAVELING AHEAD. BUT SUCH COMMITMENT HAD BELONGED TO A MAN CONVINCED HIS ACTIONS HAD SOME SIGNIFICANT EFFECT UPON THE WORLD.

HE WAS WISER NOW.

THE AGENTS OF THE EAST AND WEST WENT ABOUT THEIR SECRET WORK YEAR IN, YEAR OUT. THEY PLOTTED; THEY CONNIVED; OCCASIONALLY (THOUGH RARELY) THEY SHED BLOOD. THERE WERE DEBACCHES AND TRADE-OFFS AND MINOR TACTICAL VICTORIES.



BUT IN THE END THINGS WERE MUCH THE SAME AS EVER.

THIS CITY, FOR INSTANCE. BALLARD HAD COME TO BERLIN IN APRIL OF 1969. HE'D BEEN 29, FRESH FROM YEARS OF INTENSIVE TRAINING AND READY TO LIVE A LITTLE. BUT HE HAD NOT FELT EASY HERE. HE FOUND THE CITY CHARMLESS, OFTEN BLEAK. IT HAD TAKEN ODELL, HIS COLLEAGUE, FOR THOSE FIRST TWO YEARS, TO PROVE THAT BERLIN WAS WORTHY OF HIS AFFECTIONS, AND ONCE BALLARD FELL, HE WAS LOST FOR LIFE.

NOW HE FELT MORE AT HOME IN THIS DIVIDED CITY THAN HE EVER HAD IN LONDON. ITS UNEASE, ITS FAILED IDEALISM AND--PERHAPS MOST ACUTELY OF ALL--ITS TERRIBLE ISOLATION, MATCHED HIS.

HE FOUND MIRONENKO AT THE GEMMELDESALERIE. THE PHOTOGRAPHS HAD LIED. THE RUSSIAN LOOKED OLDER THAN HIS 46 YEARS, AND SICKER THAN HE'D APPEARED IN THOSE FILCHED PORTRAITS. NEITHER MAN MADE ANY SIGN OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

ONLY WHEN BOTH MEN WERE SATISFIED THAT THEY WERE NOT BEING WATCHED, DID THE RUSSIAN QUIT THE BUILDING AND LEAD BALLARD INTO THE FOUL-SMELLING SUBURBS OF DULHEM TO A MUTUALLY AGREED SAFE HOUSE.

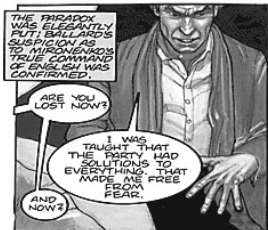
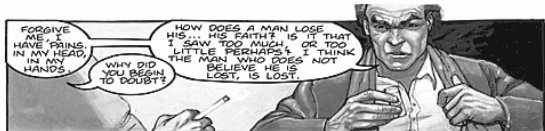


MIRONENKO'S COMMAND OF ENGLISH WAS UNCERTAIN, OR AT LEAST APPEARED SO, THOUGH BALLARD HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT HIS STRUGGLES FOR SENSE WERE AS MUCH TACTICAL AS GRAMMATICAL.

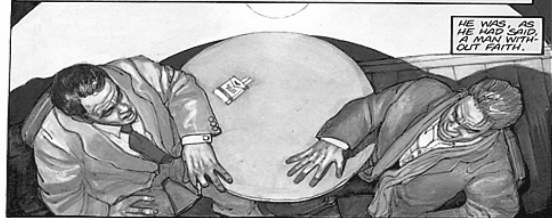


I AM NO LONGER A COMMUNIST. I HAVE NOT BEEN A PARTY MEMBER... NOT IN MY HEART... FOR MANY YEARS.





THEY TALKED FOR AN HOUR OR MORE, THE CONVERSATION MOVING BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN POLITICS AND PERSONAL REMINISCENCE. BETWEEN TRIVIA AND CONFESSION AND AT THE END OF THE MEETING, BALLARD WAS IN NO DOUBT AS TO MIROZENKO'S ANTI-PATHY TO HIS MASTERS.





THE NEXT NEWS ABOUT THE CASE REACHED BALLARD VIA THE PAGES OF THE MORNING PAPERS. IN AN ARTICLE ABOUT A BODY FOUND IN A HOUSE NEAR THE STATION ON KAISER DAMM, AT THE TIME OF READING, HE HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING HOW THE ACCOUNT TIED WITH MIRONENKO, BUT THERE WAS ENOUGH DETAIL IN THE STORY TO AROUSE HIS INTEREST.



ABOUT NOON, BALLARD WENT TO SEE CRIPPS AT HIS OFFICE IN HOPES OF COAKING HIM WITH SOME EXPLANATION, BUT CRIPPS WAS NOT AVAILABLE, NOR WOULD HE BE, HIS SECRETARY EXPLAINED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE; MATTERS AROUND HAD TAKEN HIM BACK TO MUNICH.



DAMNIT.

FOR ONE, HE HAD THE SUSPICION THAT THE HOUSE NAMED IN THE ARTICLE HAD BEEN USED BY THE SERVICE ON OCCASION; FOR ANOTHER, THE ARTICLE DESCRIBED HOW TWO UNIDENTIFIED MEN HAD BEEN CAUGHT IN THE ACT OF REMOVING THE BODY, FURTHER SUGGESTING THAT THIS WAS NO CRIME OF PASSION.



AS HE STEPPED INTO THE COLD AIR AGAIN, HE REALIZED HE HAD GAINED AN ADMIRER.

BALLARD KNEW HIM IN PASSING FROM CRIPPS' ENTOURAGE, BUT HE COULDN'T PUT A NAME TO THE FACE. IT WAS SWIFTLY PROVIDED.

SUCKLING.

OF COURSE. HELLO.

I THINK MAYBE WE SHOULD TALK, IF YOU HAVE A MOMENT. I SUPPOSE YOU HEARD ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO CRIPPS.

NO

WE SHOULD TALK.

CRIPPS, IT APPEARED, HAD MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO MEET WITH MIRONENKO IN ORDER TO MAKE HIS OWN ASSESSMENT OF THE RUSSIAN'S INTEGRITY. THE HOUSE IN SCHÖNEBERG HAD BEEN USED ON SEVERAL PREVIOUS OCCASIONS AND HAD LONG BEEN CONSIDERED ONE OF THE SAFEST LOCATIONS IN THE CITY.

KGB MEN HAD APPARENTLY FOLLOWED MIRONENKO TO THE HOUSE AND THEN ATTEMPTED TO BREAK UP THE PARTY.

ONE OF BALLARD'S OLD COLLEAGUES, ODELL, WAS DEAD; CRIPPS WAS IN A COMA.



AND MIRONENKO?

I'M TOUCHED THAT YOU'RE KEEPING ME UP TO DATE. BUT WHY?

THEY TOOK HIM HOME TO THE MOTHERLAND, PRESUMABLY.

BALLARD CAUGHT A WHIFF OF DECEIT.

YOU AND ODELL WERE FRIENDS, WEREN'T YOU? WITH CRIPPS OUT OF THE PICTURE, YOU DON'T HAVE MANY OF THOSE LEFT.

IS THAT SO?

NO OFFENSE INTENDED, BUT YOU'VE GOT REPUTATION AS A MAVERICK.

GET TO THE POINT.

THERE IS NO POINT. I JUST THOUGHT YOU OUGHT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED. I'M PUTTING MY NECK ON THE LINE HERE.

NICE TRY.



WHO SENT YOU?
NOBODY SENT ME.

CLEVER TO SEND THE COURT GOSSIP. I ALMOST FELL FOR IT. YOU'RE VERY PLAUSIBLE. WHAT DO THEY SUSPECT ME OF HERE?

DO THEY THINK I'M CONNIVING WITH MIROZENKO, IS THAT IT? NO, I DON'T THINK THEY'RE THAT STUPID.

YOU LIKE MAKING ENEMIES?

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD. I DON'T LOSE SLEEP OVER IT.

THERE'S CHANGES IN THE AIR. I'D MAKE SURE TO HAVE YOUR ANSWERS READY.

FUCK THE ANSWERS. I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME I WORKED-OUT THE RIGHT QUESTIONS.

SENDING SUCKLING TO SOUND HIM OUT SMACKED OF DESPERATION. THEY WANTED INSIDE INFORMATION.

BUT ABOUT WHAT?

A STRANGE HAPPINESS HAD FOUND SERGEI MIROZENKO-- HAPPINESS THAT CAME WITHOUT RHYME OR REASON AND FILLED HIS HEART TO OVERFLOWING. ONLY THE PREVIOUS DAY, CIRCUMSTANCES HAD SEEMED UNENDURABLE.

THE ACHING IN HIS HANDS AND HEAD AND SPINE HAD STEADILY WORSENED AND WAS NOW ACCOMPANIED BY AN ITCH SO DEMANDING, HE'D HAD TO SNIP HIS NAILS TO THE FLESH TO PREVENT HIMSELF DOING SERIOUS DAMAGE.

HIS BODY WAS IN REVOLT AGAINST HIM. IT WAS THAT THOUGHT WHICH HE HAD TRIED TO EXPLAIN TO BALLARD: THAT HE WAS DIVIDED FROM HIMSELF AND FEARED THAT HE WOULD SOON BE TORN APART.

BUT TODAY THE FEAR HAD GONE.

NOT SO THE PAINS. THEY WERE, IF ANYTHING, WORSE THAN THEY'D BEEN YESTERDAY. HIS SINEWS AND LIGAMENTS ACHED AS IF THEY'D BEEN EXERCISED BEYOND THE LIMITS OF THEIR DESIGN. THERE WERE BRUISES ON ALL THE JOINTS WHERE BLOOD HAD BROKEN ITS BANKS BENEATH THE SKIN.

BUT THAT SENSE OF IMMINENT REBELLION HAD DISAPPEARED, TO BE REPLACED WITH A DREAMY PEACEFULNESS. AND AT ITS HEART, SUCH HAPPINESS.

BALLARD WOULD KNOW HOW THINGS STOOD. MIROZENKO HAD LIKED AND TRUSTED THE ENGLISHMAN FROM THE BEGINNING, SENSING THAT DESPITE THE MANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM, THEY WERE MORE ALIKE THAN NOT. IF HE LET HIS INSTINCTS LEAD, HE WOULD FIND BALLARD.

WHEN HE TRIED TO THINK BACK OVER RECENT EVENTS, HIS MEMORY PLAYED TRICKS. HE HAD BEEN CALLED TO MEET WITH BALLARD'S SUPERIOR, THAT HE REMEMBERED. WHETHER HE HAD GONE TO THE MEETING, HE DID NOT. THE NIGHT WAS A BLANK.

NO DOUBT THE ENGLISHMAN WOULD BE SURPRISED TO SEE HIM, EVEN ANGERED AT FIRST. BUT WHEN HE TOLD BALLARD OF THIS NEWFOUND HAPPINESS, SURELY HIS TRESSASSES WOULD BE FORGIVENT.

BALLARD DINED LATE AND DRANK LATER STILL IN THE RING, A SMALL TRANSVESTITE BAR HE HAD FIRST BEEN TAKEN TO BY ODELL ALMOST TWO DECADES AGO.

BALLARD, THOUGH HE NEVER FELT ANY SEXUAL FRISSEN THERE, HAD IMMEDIATELY FELT AT HOME.

HIS NEUTRALITY WAS RESPECTED. NO ATTEMPTS WERE MADE TO SOLICIT HIM.

HE WAS SIMPLY LEFT TO DRINK AND WATCH THE PASSING PARADE OF GENDERS.

COMING HERE TONIGHT RAISED THE GHOST OF ODELL, WHOSE NAME WOULD NOW BE SCRUBBED FROM CONVERSATION BECAUSE OF HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH THE MIRONENKO AFFAIR.

HISTORY DID NOT FORGIVE FAILURE UNLESS IT WAS SO PROFOUND AS TO ACHIEVE A KIND OF GRANDEUR. FOR THE ODELLS OF THE WORLD, THERE WOULD ONLY BE OBLIVION.

OUTSIDE, A YOUNG MAN-- LAUGHING, GLAMOROUSLY DRESSED-- TOTTERED ALONG THE PAVEMENT, ARM IN ARM WITH AN UNSMILING ESCORT.

BALLARD RECOGNIZED THE TRANSVESTITE AS A REGULAR AT THE BAR; THE CLIENT, TO JUDGE BY HIS SOBER SUIT, WAS AN OUT-OF-TOWNER SLAKING HIS THIRST FOR BOYS DRESSED AS GIRLS.

HE CAUGHT A SHADOW MOVING OUT OF THE CORNER OF HIS EYE. SOMEONE FOLLOWING HIM, MOST LIKELY. THOUGH THE ALCOHOL HAD BLURRED HIS INSTINCTS, HE FELT SOME ANXIETY SURGE. THE ROOT OF WHICH HE COULDN'T FIX. FEATHER-LIGHT TREMORS RAN IN HIS SCALP.

THE LAUGHTER FROM BEHIND HIM HAD CEASED. SOMEWHERE NEAR, A DOG HAD BEGUN TO BARK WILDLY.

WHATEVER WAS AROUSING THE BUZZ IN HIS HEAD AND THE ITCH IN HIS PALMS, IT WAS NO COMMONPLACE ANXIETY.

HE COULD SENSE NO LIVING PRESENCE IN THE GLOOM. A LUXURIOUS STENCH HAD CREEPT INTO THE AIR WHICH BECAME MORE AVISH YET AS HE APPROACHED THE ALLEY.

AS HE BREATHED, THE BUZZING IN HIS HEAD DEEPENED TO A THUNDER.

A SINGLE LIGHT FLICKERED IN THE THROAT OF THE ALLEY. A MEASER WASH FROM AN UPPER WINDOW.

THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE STREET, DESPITE ITS SHOW OF NAUGHTY CENCE; IT HID TERRORS. THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF KURFÜRSTENDAMM WERE NO MORE THAN THREE MINUTES' WALK AWAY, BUT HE DIDN'T WANT TO TURN HIS BACK ON THIS MYSTERY.

THE DOG HAD NOW CEASED ITS ALARM. HE HAD ONLY HIS FOOTSTEPS FOR COMPANY.

BY IT BALLARD SAW THE BODY OF THE OUT-OF-TOWNER SPRAWLED ON THE GROUND.

HE HAD BEEN SO TRAUMATICALLY MUTILATED, IT SEEMED AN ATTEMPT MIGHT HAVE BEEN MADE TO TURN HIM INSIDE OUT, FROM THE SPILLED INNARDS THAT RIPE SMELL ROSE IN ALL ITS COMPLEXITY.

BALLARD HAD SEEN VIOLENT DEATH BEFORE, BUT SOMETHING HERE IN THE ALLEY THREW HIS CALM INTO DISARRAY. AND THEN, FROM BEYOND THE THROW OF LIGHT, THE BOY SPOKE.

IN GOD'S NAME...

THE SHAKING IN BALLARD'S LIMBS WORSENER AS HE FOLLOWED THE BOY'S GAZE. IT WAS ALL HE COULD DO TO PREVENT HIS TEETH FROM CHATTERING.

NEVERTHELESS, HE CONTINUED HIS ADVANCE BECAUSE HE WAS CURIOUS, MORE THAN CURIOUS, EAGER TO SEE WHAT MANNER OF MAN WAS CAPABLE OF SUCH CASUAL VIOLENCE.

AHHHH!

THE BOY WAS HALF-SLUMPED AGAINST THE WALL, AMONG THE REFUSE. HE SEEMED NOT TO NOTICE BALLARD. HIS EYES WERE FIXED ON THE DEEPEST SHADOWS.

TO LOOK IN THE EYES OF SUCH FEROCITY SEEMED AT THAT MOMENT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE WORLD.

THE DIN IN HIS HEAD TOOK ON A SICKENING RHYTHM, LIKE THE SOUND OF HELICOPTER ROTORS, AS SOMETHING BRUSHED AGAINST HIM. IN MERES SECONDS, IT MOUNTED TO A BLINDING ROAR.

DID YOU SEE IT?
DID YOU SEE IT?

BALLARD GLIMPSED THE MAN SLIPPING AWAY DOWN THE PASSAGEWAY. HE SEEMED SOMEHOW MISSHAPEN, HIS BACK CROOKED, HIS HEAD TOO LARGE.

WHO WAS IT?
SOMEBODY YOU KNEW?

SOMEBODY...?

BALLARD WAS ABOUT TO REPEAT THE QUESTION WHEN THERE CAME THE SHRIEK OF BRAKES, SWIFTLY FOLLOWED BY THE SOUND OF IMPACT.

SHREEEE E E

A CAR WAS STRADDLING THE PAVEMENT WHEN BALLARD ARRIVED. THE DRIVER WAS BEING MOVERED FROM HIS SEAT WHILE THE PASSENGERS DEBATED FURIOUSLY AS TO HOW THE ACCIDENT HAD HAPPENED.



ONE OF THE WOMEN WAS TALKING ABOUT AN ANIMAL IN THE ROAD, BUT ANOTHER PASSENGER CORRECTED HER.

THE BODY THAT LAY IN THE GUTTER WHERE IT HAD BEEN THROWN WAS NOT THAT OF AN ANIMAL.



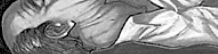
BALLARD HAD SEEN LITTLE OF THE KILLER IN THE ALLEYWAY, BUT HE KNEW INSTINCTIVELY THAT THIS WAS HE. THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE MALFORMATION HE THOUGHT HE'D GLIMPSED, HOWEVER. JUST A MAN DRESSED IN A SUIT THAT HAD SEEN BETTER DAYS, LYING IN A PATCH OF BLOOD.

THERE WAS NOTHING THERE OF THE FEROCITY HE HAD HOPED SO MUCH TO SEE.



BUT THERE WAS MUCH HE RECOGNIZED NEVERTHELESS.

THE MAN WAS ODELL.



WHY HAD HE BEEN LIED TO ABOUT ODELL'S DEATH, AND WHAT PSY-CHOSS HAD SEIZED THE MAN THAT MADE HIM CAPABLE OF THE SLAUGHTER BALLARD HAD WITNESSED? HE WOULD NOT GET THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS FROM HIS SOMETIME COLLEAGUES, THAT HE KNEW.



THE ONLY MAN HE MIGHT HAVE BEGUILED AN ANSWER FROM WAS CRIPPS, AND HE WAS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND.

TWO HIGHLY VALUED AGENTS MURDERED, MIRONENKO MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD, HE HIMSELF -- IF SUCKLING WAS TO BE BELIEVED -- AT DEATH'S DOOR. AND ALL THIS BEGUN WITH SERGEI MIRONENKO, THE LOST MAN OF BERLIN. IT SEEMED TRAGEDY WAS INFECTIOUS.



DESPITE HIS EXHAUSTION, SLEEP ELUDED HIM FOR AN HOUR OR MORE, AND WHEN IT CAME, IT WAS NO COMFORT. HE DREAMT WHISPERS, AND HARD UPON THEM, RISING AS IF TO DROWN THEM OUT, THE ROAR OF HELICOPTERS. TWICE HE SURFACED FROM SLEEP WITH HIS HEAD POUNDING.

WHEN HE WOKE FOR THE THIRD TIME, THE NOISE BETWEEN HIS TEMPLES HAD BECOME CRIPPLING, A THOUGHT-CANCELING ASSAULT WHICH MADE HIM FEAR FOR HIS SANITY.



PLEASE...

A COOL VOICE ANSWERED HIM OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

TAKE THE PAIN AWAY...



YOU CAN DO THAT FOR YOURSELF.



I DON'T KNOW HOW.

YOUR DREAMS GIVE YOU PAIN, SO YOU MUST FORGET THEM.



DO YOU UNDERSTAND? FORGET THEM, AND THE PAIN WILL GO.

THE DREAM MEANS YOU HARM. BALLARD, YOU MUST BURY IT. BURY IT DEEP. MAKE AN IMAGE OF IT. BALLARD. PICTURE IT IN DETAIL.

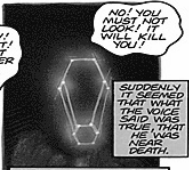
HE DID AS HE WAS TOLD. HE IMAGINED A BURIAL PARTY, AND A BOX, AND IN THE BOX, THIS DREAM.



THE DREAM WOULD NOT LIE DOWN. IT BEAT AGAINST CONFINEMENT.

QUICKLY! FINISH IT! COVER IT UP! COVER IT UP, DAMN YOU!

BALLARD TRIED TO MAKE THE BURIAL PARTY OBEY, TRIED TO WILL THEM TO PICK UP THEIR SHOVELS, AND BURY THE OFFENDING THING ALIVE, BUT THEY WOULD NOT.



NO! YOU MUST NOT LOOK! IT WILL KILL YOU!

SUDDENLY IT SEEMED THAT WHAT THE VOICE SAID WAS TRUE, THAT HE WAS NEAR DEATH.



BUT IT WASN'T THE DREAM THAT WAS CONSPIRING TO KILL HIM BUT THE SENTINEL THEY HAD POSTED BETWEEN HIM AND IT: THE SKULL-SPLINTERING CACOPHONY.

INSTEAD THEY GAZED INTO THE GRAVE AS HE DID, AND WATCHED AS THE CONTENTS OF THE BOX FOUGHT FOR LIGHT.

BEHIND HIM THE VOICE, ITS TANTRUM CONTROLLED, BEGAN ITS EXTORTION JERESH. IT SOUNDED SO INTIMATE THAT HE LOOKED ROUND, FULLY EXPECTING TO SEE THE SPEAKER, AND HE WAS NOT DISAPPOINTED. THE LIGHT HERE WAS BRIGHT, AND DEAD IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM STOOD THE FACE BEHIND THE VOICE, SMILING.



YOUR DREAMS GIVE YOU PAIN. BURY THEM, BALLARD, AND THE PAIN WILL PASS. TRUST US. WE'RE YOUR FRIENDS.



WE WANT TO HELP YOU.

NO...



NO, DAMN YOU... I DON'T... I DON'T BELIEVE...

THE ROOM FLICKERED OUT, AND HE WAS IN THE BEDROOM AGAIN.



HE LAY DOWN ON THE SAME CRUMPLED SHEETS AS HE'D LAIN BEFORE, YET NOTHING WAS THE SAME. HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HAD CHANGED IN HIM, OR HOW.

BUT HE LAY THERE WITHOUT SLEEP, DISTURBING HIS SERENITY THROUGH THE REMAINING HOURS OF THE NIGHT, TRYING TO PUZZLE IT OUT, AND A LITTLE BEFORE DAWN HE REMEMBERED THE WORDS HE HAD MUTTERED.

SIMPLE WORDS, BUT OH, THE POWER.

I DON'T BELIEVE...

ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND, COMING HERE?

JUST POINT ME TO CRIPPS, AND I'LL BE AWAY.

I'M GOING TO REPORT THIS, DAMN YOU!

I THINK YOU SHOULD, IN THE MEANWHILE. WHERE'S CRIPPS?

I'LL HAVE SOMEONE CALL ON YOU, TAKE YOU TO HIM.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH. ONCE MORE, THE OLD MAN.

TAKE YOUR FUCKING HANDS OFF ME. I'LL HAVE YOU CARPETED FOR THIS. I'LL HAVE YOU OUT!

I'M OUT ANYWAY. PEOPLE HAVE DIED, REMEMBER? LONDON NEEDS A SACRIFICIAL LAMB, AND THINK I'M IT. SO I'VE GOT NOTHING TO LOSE, HAVE I?

CRIPPS IS DEAD.

YOU SAID THE SAME ABOUT ODELL, AND I SAW HIM ONLY LAST NIGHT.

YOU SAW ODELL?

MENTION OF THE DEAD MAN BROUGHT THE SCENE IN THE ALLEYWAY BACK TO MIND. THE SMELL OF THE BODY, THE BOYS SOBS. THERE WERE OTHER FAITHS, BALLARD THOUGHT, BEYOND THE ONES HE'D ONCE SHARED WITH THE CREATURE BENEATH HIM.

FAITHS WHOSE DEVOTIONS WERE MADE IN HEAT AND BLOOD. WHOSE DOGMAS WERE DREAMS. SOMEWHERE AT THE VERY BACK OF HIS HEAD, HE COULD HEAR THE HELICOPTERS, BUT HE WOULDN'T LET THEM TAKE TO THE AIR.

NOW THEY WOULD COME FOR HIM; HE COULD HAVE NO DOUBT OF THAT. THE THOUGHT DID NOT DISTRESS HIM. WHAT- EVER THEY HAD TRIED TO MAKE HIM FORGET WITH THEIR BRAINWASHING WAS MORE AMBITIOUS THAN THEY HAD ANTICIPATED; HOWEVER DEEPLY THEY HAD TAUGHT HIM TO BURY IT, IT WAS DIGGING ITS WAY BACK TO THE SURFACE. HE COULDN'T SEE IT YET, BUT HE KNEW IT WAS NEAR.

MAYBE HE WAS STILL BEING TAILED, BUT HIS INSTINCTS INFORMED HIM OTHERWISE.

THE PRESENCE HE FELT CLOSE BY--SO NEAR THAT IT WAS SOMETIMES AT HIS SHOULDER--WAS PERHAPS SIMPLY ANOTHER PART OF HIM.

IT FELT GOOD TO BE ALIVE, DESPITE THE CHILL THAT RENDERED THE GRIM STREETS GRIMMER STILL. BALLARD DECIDED FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON, TO GO TO THE ZOO, WHICH THOUGH HE HAD BEEN VISITING THE CITY FOR TWO DECADES, HE HAD NEVER DONE.

AS HE WALKED, IT OCCURRED TO HIM THAT HE'D NEVER BEEN AS FREE AS HE WAS NOW, THAT HE HAD SHED MASTERY LIKE AN OLD COAT.

NO WONDER THEY FEARED HIM. THEY HAD GOOD REASON.

HEY!

IT WAS A NOTE FROM MIRONENKO, AND IT REQUESTED A MEETING TO TALK OF A MATTER OF CONSIDERABLE URGENCY, NAMING A HOUSE ON MARIENFELDE AS A VENUE.

IT WAS PERFECTLY POSSIBLE THAT THE INVITATION WAS A TRAP, OF COURSE. SET BY EITHER HIS OWN FACTION OR THE OPPOSITION, PERHAPS A WAY TO TEST HIS ALLEGIANCE, OR TO MANIPULATE HIM INTO A SITUATION IN WHICH HE COULD BE EASILY DISPATCHED.

DESPITE SUCH DOUBTS, HE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO GO. WHATEVER DANGERS THIS RENDEZVOUS BROUGHT, THEY WERE NOT SO NEW. INDEED, GIVEN HIS LONG-HELD DOUBTS OF THE EFFICACY OF SIGHT, HADN'T EVERY OTHER DATE BEEN IN SOME SENSE BLIND?

BALLARD WENT QUICKLY THROUGH THE QUIET STREETS. HE SCARCELY KNEW THE DISTRICT AT ALL, BUT ITS PROXIMITY TO THE WALL BLEED IT OF WHAT LITTLE CHARM IT MIGHT ONCE HAVE POSSESSED. MANY OF THE HOUSES WERE UNOCCUPIED.

IT WAS ONLY WITH THE AID OF A MAP THAT HE LOCATED THE TINY STREET MIRDNENKO'S NOTE HAD NAMED.

NO LIGHTS BURNED IN THE HOUSE. BALLARD ANTICIPATED SEVERAL POSSIBLE SCENARIOS, BUT AN ABSENCE OF RESPONSE AT THE HOUSE HAD NOT BEEN AMONG THEM.

AFTER HE KNOCKED AGAIN, HE HEARD SOUNDS FROM WITHIN.

AND FINALLY THE DOOR WAS OPEN TO HIM. THE MAN SILHQUETTED AGAINST THE DRAB INTERIOR WAS NOT MIRDNENKO.

YES?
WHAT
DO YOU
WANT?

I'M
LOOKING
FOR A
FRIEND
OF MINE.

THERE'S
NOBODY
HERE.
ONLY
ME.

I WAS
TOLD--

YOU MUST
HAVE THE
WRONG
HOUSE.

CRASH HHHH!
SLAM!

AS THE DOORKEEPER MADE THE REMARK, NOISE ERUPTED FROM DOWN THE DREARY HALLWAY. FURNITURE WAS BEING OVERTURNED; SOMEBODY HAD BEGUN TO SHOUT.

THE ROOM BEYOND HAD SCARLET FLOORBOARDS; THEY GLISTENED AS IF FRESHLY PAINTED.

AND NOW THE
DECORATOR
APPEARED
IN PERSON.

THE SOUND OF
DEMOLITION
HAD ESCALATED
AND WAS NOW
DROWNED-OUT
BY THE SOUND
OF A MAN
SQUEALING.

GET OFF!!
MEEE!!
Ahhhhhh!

ARCH



HE MET BALLARD'S GAZE, HIS EYES FULL TO OVERFLOWING WITH DEATH, BUT THE BODY HAD NOT YET RECEIVED THE INSTRUCTION TO LIE DOWN AND DIE. IT JITTERED ON IN A PITIFUL ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE THE SCENE OF EXECUTION BEHIND HIM.



THE OUTBURST, IN PANICKED RUSSIAN, WAS BEYOND BALLARD, BUT HE NEEDED NO TRANSLATION OF THE HANDS THAT ENCIROLED HIS THROAT.



BALLARD LOOKED BACK TOWARD THE SCARLET ROOM. THE DEAD MAN HAD GONE, THOUGH SCRAPES OF FLESH HAD BEEN LEFT ON THE THRESHOLD.

FROM WITHIN LAUGHTER.



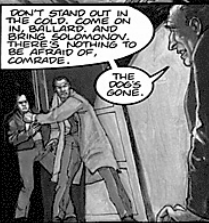
WHAT IN GOD'S NAME IS GOING ON?!

EVEN AS HE SPOKE, THE LAUGHTER STOPPED. A SHADOW MOVED ACROSS THE BLOOD-SPATTERED WALL OF THE INTERIOR, AND A VOICE SAID:

BALLARD?

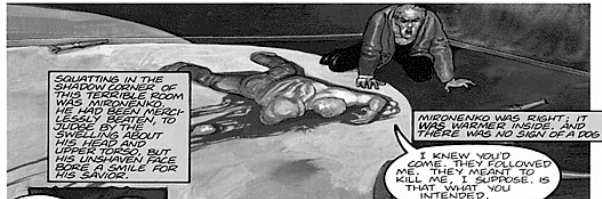


IT WAS THE VOICE OF MIRONENKO.



DON'T STAND OUT IN THE COLD. COME ON IN, BALLARD. AND BRING SOLOMONOV. THERE'S NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF, COMRADE.

THE DOG'S GONE.



SQUATTING IN THE SHADOW CORNER OF THIS TERRIBLE ROOM WAS MIRONENKO. HE HAD BEEN MERCILESSLY BEATEN, TO JUDGE BY THE SWELLING ABOUT HIS HEAD AND UPPER TORSO, BUT HIS UNSHAVEN FACE BORE A SMILE FOR HIS SAVIOR.

MIRONENKO WAS RIGHT; IT WAS WARMER INSIDE. AND THERE WAS NO SIGN OF A DOG.

I KNEW YOU'D COME. THEY MEANT TO KILL ME, I SUPPOSE. IS THAT WHAT YOU INTENDED, COMRADE?

WHAT STOPPED THEM?

YOU'LL SAY WHAT THEY WANT YOU TO SAY, COMRADE, THE WAY WE ALL MUST.

ISN'T THAT RIGHT BALLARD? ALL SLAVES OF OUR FAITH?

TELL MR. BALLARD TELL HIM WHAT HAPPENED.

OF WHAT?

OF OURSELVES.

WHAT HAD SOLOMONOV AND HIS DEAD COMPANION DONE TO HIM? HIS FLESH WAS A MASS OF TINY CONTUSIONS, AND THERE WERE BLOODED LUMPS AT HIS NECK AND TEMPLES WHICH BALLARD MIGHT HAVE TAKEN FOR BRUISES, BUT THEY PALPITATED, AS IF SOMETHING NESTED BENEATH THE SKIN.

HE'S KGB, OF COURSE. BOTH TRUSTED MEN.

BUT NOT TRUSTED ENOUGH TO BE WARNED, POOR IDIOTS.

SO THEY WERE SENT TO MURDER ME WITH JUST A GUN AND A PRAYER. NEITHER OF WHICH WERE MUCH USE IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

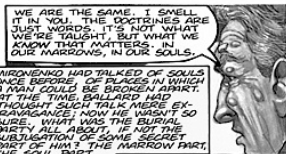
I BEG YOU... LET ME GO. I'LL SAY NOTHING.

MIRONENKO REACHED OUT FOR SOLOMONOV. AT HIS TOUCH, THE FAILED ASSASSIN LOST CONTROL OF HIS BLADDER, BUT MIRONENKO'S INTENTIONS WERE NOT MURDEROUS.

GO BACK TO THEM. TELL THEM WHAT YOU'VE SEEN. GO ON. LEAVE UP, PLEASE. OR WOULD YOU PREFER TO STAY AND EAT?

SOLOMONOV SEEMED SCARCELY TO BELIEVE HIS EARS.

TELL THEM!



WE DON'T
HAVE TO RUN,
THEY'RE NOT
FOLLOWING.

THEY'RE
ALWAYS
FOLLOWING.
NO TIME
TO
DEBATE.

BALLARD HESITATED
A MOMENT, INCAUTIOUS
AS IT WAS, HE WANTED
TO CATCH A GLIMPSE
OF HIS PURSUERS SO
AS TO KNOW THEM IN
THE FUTURE.

BUT NOW, AS THE SOFT
PAD OF MIROZENKO'S
STEP DIMINISHED INTO
SILENCE, HE REALIZED
THAT THE OTHER FOOT-
STEPS HAD ALSO
CEASED. DID THEY KNOW
HE WAS WAITING FOR
THEM?

HE SEEMED TO
BE ALONE.

RELUCTANTLY, HE GAVE UP WAITING AND WENT
AFTER THE RUSSIAN. THERE WAS NO SIGN OF
MIROZENKO IN EITHER DIRECTION. CURSING
HIS STUPIDITY IN LINGERING BEHIND,
BALLARD FOLLOWED THE ROUTE WHICH WAS
MOST HEAVILY SHROUDED IN FOG.

THE STREET HAD SEEMED
PIN-POINT QUIET, BUT IT
CLEARLY WASN'T, FOR IT
WAS QUIETER STILL IN
THE PARK.

HE KNEW INTUITIVELY THAT HE
HAD CHOSEN THE RIGHT ROAD,
THAT MIROZENKO HAD SCALED
THIS WALL AND WAS WAITING
FOR HIM SOMEWHERE CLOSE.
BEHIND HIM, THE FOG KEPT
ITS COUNSEL, EITHER THEIR
PURSUERS HAD LOST HIM, OR
THEIR WAY, OR BOTH.

THE FOG WAS CHILLER HERE AND
PRESSED MORE INSISTENTLY UPON HIM
AS HE ADVANCED ACROSS THE WET GRASS.

SUDDENLY HE SAW A FIGURE WAITING
FOR HIM A FEW YARDS AHEAD. THE
BRUISES NOW TWISTED HIS FACE SO
BADLY BALLARD WOULD NOT HAVE
KNOWN IT TO BE MIROZENKO BUT
THAT HIS EYES BURNED SO BRIGHTLY.

THE MAN DID NOT WAIT FOR
BALLARD BUT TURNED AND
LOPED OFF INTO INSOLIDITY,
LEAVING THE ENGLISHMAN
TO FOLLOW.

HE FELT A MOVEMENT CLOSE AND
KNEW THAT HE WAS NOT ALONE.
HAD MIROZENKO GIVEN UP THE
RACE AND COME BACK TO ES-
CORT HIM?

SPEAK.

THERE WAS NO REPLY
OUT OF THE FOG.



THEN, MOVEMENT. THE FOG CURLED UPON ITSELF AND GLIMPSED A FORM DIVIDING THE VEILS.

MIRONENKO!

HE SAW THE PHANTOM FOR A MOMENT ONLY, LONG ENOUGH TO GLIMPSE INCANDESCENT EYES AND TEETH GROWN SO VAST THEY WRINCHED THE MOUTH INTO A PERMANENT GRIMACE. OF THOSE FACTS HE WAS CERTAIN. OF THE BRISTLING FLESH, AND MONSTROUS LIMBS -- HE WAS LESS SURE.

DAMN YOU.

THE THUNDER IN HIS HEAD RUMBLING MENACINGLY. TO HIS RIGHT, HE HEARD GROWLS; TO HIS LEFT, ANOTHER INDETERMINATE FORM CAME AND WENT. HE WAS SURROUNDED, IT SEEMED, BY MAD MEN AND WILD DOGS.

BALLARD.

ITS VOICE CLUNG TO COHERENCE ONLY WITH THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY. BUT BALLARD HEARD THE REMNANTS OF MIRONENKO THERE.

DON'T BE AFRAID

WHAT DISEASE IS THIS?

AND MIRONENKO, WHERE WAS HE? PART OF THIS ASSEMBLY OR PREY TO IT?

THE ONLY DISEASE I EVER SUFFERED WAS FORGETFULNESS AND I'M CURED OF THAT--

... YOU REMEMBER TOO, DON'T YOU? YOU'RE THE SAME.

NO.

DON'T BE AFRAID. YOU'RE NOT ALONE. THERE ARE MANY OF US. BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

I'M NOT YOUR BROTHER

DON'T YOU TASTE FREEDOM, BALLARD? AND LIFE. JUST A BREATH AWAY. IT ONLY HURTS FOR A WHILE. THEN THE PAIN GOES...

THEY WON'T TAKE YOU BACK! YOU'VE SEEN TOO MUCH.

THE HELICOPTERS ROARED IN BALLARD'S HEAD BUT DID NOT ENTIRELY SLOUT OUT THE WORDS. HE KNEW THERE WAS TRUTH IN THEM.

LOOK! LOOK AT WHAT YOU ARE!

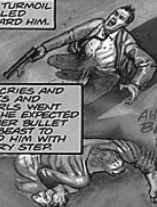


THE ROTORS ROARED; BALLARD'S LESS FELT AS THOUGH THEY WOULD FOLD UP BENEATH HIM. BUT HE HAD TO GET BACK TO THE WALL. WITHIN YARDS OF IT, MIROZENKO CALLED AFTER HIM AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME THE WORDS HAD FLED ALTOGETHER. THERE WAS ONLY A LOW GROWL.



THE TURMOIL SPILLED TOWARD HIM.

THE CRIES AND SHOTS AND SNARLS WENT ON; HE EXPECTED EITHER BULLET OR BEAST TO FIND HIM WITH EVERY STEP.



BALLARD COULD NOT RESIST LOOKING BACK, JUST ONCE. HE SAW THE THING THAT HAD BEEN MIROZENKO, AND THE ROTORS GREW TO A SCREAMING PITCH.



SUDDENLY A SHOT RANG OUT. THEN A VOLLEY OF SHOTS. THOUGH HE HAD FORGOTTEN THEIR PURSUERS, THEY HAD NOT FORGOTTEN HIM.

THEY HAD TRACED HIM TO THE PARK AND STEPPED INTO THE MIDST OF THIS LUNACY, AND NOW MEN AND HALF-MEN AND THINGS NOT MEN WERE LOST IN THE FOG, AND THERE WAS BLOODY CONFUSION ON EVERY SIDE.



BUT HE REACHED THE WALL ALIVE AND ATTEMPTED TO SCALE IT. HIS COORDINATION HAD DESERTED HIM, HOWEVER. BEHIND HIM THE SCENES OF UNMASKING AND TRANSFORMATION AND MISTAKEN IDENTITY WENT ON. BALLARD'S ENFEEBLED THOUGHT TURNED TO MIROZENKO. WOULD HE, OR ANY OF HIS TRIBE, SURVIVE THIS MASSACRE?



BALLARD RECOGNIZED THE VOICE.

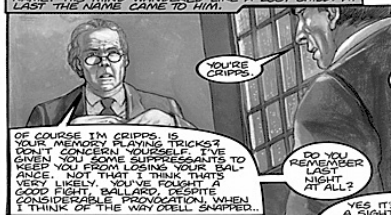


BALLARD.

SLEEP.

HE'D HEARD IT IN HIS DELUSIONS, AND IT HAD TOLD HIM LIES.

AT FIRST BALLARD COULDN'T REMEMBER THE MAN'S NAME. HIS MIND WANDERED LIKE A LOST CHILD. AT LAST THE NAME CAME TO HIM.



YOU'RE CRIPPS.

OF COURSE I'M CRIPPS. IS YOUR MEMORY PLAYING TRICKS? DON'T CONCERN YOURSELF. I'VE GIVEN YOU SOME SUPPRESSANTS TO KEEP YOU FROM LOSING YOUR BALANCE. NOT THAT I THINK THAT'S VERY LIKELY. YOU'VE FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT BALLARD, DESPITE CONSIDERABLE PROVOCATION. WHEN I THINK OF THE WAY ODELL SNAPPED...

DO YOU REMEMBER LAST NIGHT AT ALL?

WE HEARD RUMORS, OF COURSE; AND THEN, AFTER YOU'D MET WITH HIM, I BEGAN TO WONDER ABOUT MIRONENKO.

THAT'S WHY THE MEETING.

AND OF COURSE WHEN I SAW HIM FACE-TO-FACE, I KNEW. THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE EYES. SOMETHING HUNGRY.

I SAW HIM CHANGE--

YES IT'S QUITE A SIGHT ISN'T IT? THE POWER IT UNLEASHES. THAT'S WHY WE DEVELOPED THE PROGRAM. YOU SEE, TO HARNESS THAT POWER, TO HAVE IT WORK FOR US.

BUT IT'S DIFFICULT TO CONTROL.



THE PARK.

I ONLY JUST GOT YOU OUT. GOD KNOWS HOW MANY ARE DEAD.

THE OTHER... THE RUSSIAN...

MIRONENKO? I DON'T KNOW. I'M NOT IN CHARGE ANY LONGER, YOU SEE; I JUST STEPPED IN TO SALVAGE SOMETHING IF I COULD. LONDON WILL NEED US AGAIN, SOONER OR LATER. ESPECIALLY NOW THAT WE KNOW THE RUSSIANS HAVE A SPECIAL CORPS LIKE US.

IT TOOK YEARS OF SUPPRESSION THERAPY, SLOWLY BURYING THE DESIRE FOR TRANSFORMATION, SO THAT WHAT WE HAD LEFT WAS A MAN WITH A BEAST'S FACILITIES-- A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

WE THOUGHT WE HAD THE PROBLEM. BETTER THAT IF THE BELIEF SYSTEMS DIDN'T KEEP YOU SUBDUED THE PAIN RESPONSE WOULD.

BUT WE WERE WRONG.

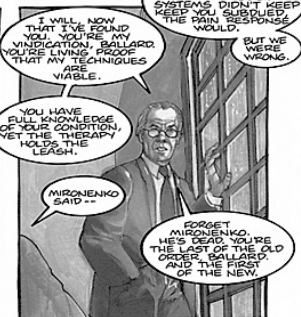


NOW WE HAVE TO START AGAIN.

SUCKLING SAID YOU'D BEEN WOUNDED.

NO. MERELY DEMOTED. ORDERED BACK TO LONDON.

BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING.



I WILL, NOW THAT I'VE FOUND YOU. YOU'RE MY VINDICATION, BALLARD. YOU'RE LIVING PROOF THAT MY TECHNIQUES ARE VIABLE.

YOU HAVE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR CONDITION, YET THE THERAPY HOLDS THE LEASH.

MIRONENKO SAID --

FORGET MIRONENKO. HE'S DEAD. YOU'RE THE LAST OF THE OLD ORDER, BALLARD. AND THE FIRST OF THE NEW.

DOWNSTAIRS
A BELL RANG.

WELL, WELL. A DELEGATION
CAME TO BEG US TO RETURN.
I HOPE YOU'RE FLATTERED.
STAY HERE. WE NEED IT
SHOW YOU OFF TONIGHT.
YOU'RE WEARY. LET THEM
WAIT, EH? LET THEM SWEAT.

THE BELL WAS BEING RUNG FOR A
SECOND TIME. BELOW, A MAN
EMERGED FROM THE BACK OF THE
CAR AND CROSSED TO THE FRONT
DOOR. EVEN AT THIS ACUTE ANGLE,
BALLARD RECOGNIZED SUCKLING.

THERE WERE VOICES IN THE HALLWAY,
AND WITH SUCKLING'S APPEARANCE,
THE DEBATE SEEMED TO BECOME
MORE HEATED.

BALLARD PRAYED CRIPPS WOULD KEEP TO HIS
WORD AND NOT ALLOW THEM TO PEER AT HIM.
HE DIDN'T WANT TO BE A BEAST LIKE MIRO-
NENKO. IT WASN'T FREEDOM WAS IT, TO BE
SO TERRIBLE? IT WAS MERELY A DIFFERENT
KIND OF TYRANNY. BUT THEN HE DIDN'T
WANT TO BE THE FIRST OF CRIPPS' HEROIC
NEW ORDER EITHER.

HE BELONGED TO NOBODY.
NOT EVEN HIMSELF.

HE WAS HOPELESSLY LOST. AND YET
HADN'T MIRONENKO SAID AT THAT
FIRST MEETING THAT THE MAN WHO
DID NOT BELIEVE HIMSELF LOST, WAS
LOST? PERHAPS BETTER THAT--
BETTER TO EXIST IN THE TWILIGHT
BETWEEN ONE SET AND ANOTHER,
TO PROSPER AS BEST HE COULD
BY DOUBT AND AMBIGUITY-- THAN
TO SUFFER THE CERTAINTIES OF
THE TOWER.

THE DEBATE BELOW WAS GAINING
MOMENTUM. IT WAS SUCKLING'S
VOICE THAT MET HIM. THE TONE
WAS WASPISH, BUT NO LESS
THREATENING FOR THAT.

IT'S OVER... DON'T
YOU UNDERSTAND PLAIN
ENGLISH? EITHER YOU COME
WITH ME IN A GENTLEMANLY
FASHION OR GIDEON AND
SHEPPARD CARRY YOU
OUT. WHICH IS IT TO BE?

YOU'RE
NOBODY,
SUCKLING.
WHAT IS
THIS?



THAT WAS YESTERDAY. THERE'VE BEEN SOME CHANGES MADE. EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY, ISN'T THAT RIGHT? I'D GET A COAT IF I WERE YOU, CRIPPS. IT'S RAINING.

ALL RIGHT. I'LL COME.

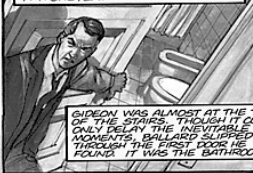
GOOD MAN. GIDEON. GO CHECK UPSTAIRS.

I'M ALONE.

I BELIEVE YOU. CHECK ANYWAY.

THERE WAS NO WAY OUT OF THE TRAP. THE Y WOULD CORNER HIM AND EXTERMINATE HIM. HE WAS A BEAST, A MAD DOG IN A MAZE. IF ONLY HE'D KILLED SUCKLING WHEN HE'D HAD THE STRENGTH TO DO SO. BUT THEN WHAT GOOD WOULD THAT HAVE DONE?

THE WORLD WAS FULL OF MEN LIKE SUCKLING. MEN BIDDING THEIR TIME UNTIL THEY COULD SHOW THEIR TRUE COLORS: VILE, SOFT, SECRET MEN. AND SUDDENLY THE BEAST SEEMED TO MOVE IN BALLARD. HE THOUGHT OF THE PARK AND THE FOG AND THE SMILE ON THE FACE OF MIROVNIKO. AND FELT A SURGE OF GRIEF FOR SOMETHING HE'D NEVER HAD. THE LIFE OF A MONSTER.



GIDEON WAS ALMOST AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS. THOUGH IT COULD ONLY DELAY THE INEVITABLE BY MOMENTS, BALLARD SLIPPED THROUGH THE FIRST DOOR HE FOUND. IT WAS THE BATHROOM.

THERE'S SOMEBODY IN HERE. OPEN UP!

BAM!
BAM!

SUCKLING WAS AT THE DOOR IN SECONDS.

WHO'S IN THERE? ANSWER ME! WHO'S THERE?

BALLARD HEARD SOMEBODY MOVE ACROSS THE HALLWAY AND THEN A SUDDEN FLURRY OF MOVEMENT. THEN, CUTTING THROUGH THE CONFUSION...

...A SINGLE SHOT.



NO, CRIPPS. YOU'RE GOING BACK TO LONDON. SHEPPARD, STOP HIM BLEEDING. GIDEON, UPSTAIRS.



THE SOUND OF RUNNING WATER FILLED THE ROOM. A PIECE OF GUTTER HAD BROKEN AND WAS DELIVERING A TORRENT OF RAINWATER ONTO THE WINDOWSILL.

THE SOUND AND THE CHILL OF THE BATHROOM BROUGHT THE NIGHT OF DELUSIONS BACK.

HE REMEMBERED THE PAIN AND THE BLOOD.

I DO NOT BELIEVE.



THE PRESSURE WAS BUILDING IN BALLARD'S SKULL. HIS EYES ACHED, AS IF ABOUT TO BE BLOWN FROM THEIR SOCKETS. HE CAUGHT SIGHT OF SOMETHING IN THE MIRROR, SOMETHING WITH GLEAMING EYES. FOR A MOMENT HE LOST SIGHT OF THE BATHROOM AND FOUND HIMSELF HOVERING ABOVE THE GRAVE THEY MADE HIM DIS.

HE COULD HEAR THE WOOD SPLINTERING.

I... DO...
NOT...
BELIEVE.

BALLARD,
MY GOD WE'VE
GOT BALLARD
AS WELL! THIS
IS OUR
LUCKY DAY.

NO. THERE WAS NOBODY
OF THAT NAME HERE.

NOBODY OF ANY NAME AT ALL, IN FACT. FOR WEREN'T NAMES THE FIRST ACT OF FAITH, THE FIRST BOARD IN THE BOX YOU BURIED FREEDOM IN? THE THING BALLARD WAS BECOMING WOULD NOT BE NAMED, NOR BOXED, NOR BURIED.

CRUNCH!



NEVER
AGAIN.

GALGGGHH!

KILL IT!

ARRRRGGGHHH!



THE MAN WHO WAS CRYING ONLY WEPT FROM ONE EYE; THE OTHER GAZED ON, ODDLY UNTOUCHED, BUT THE PAIN IN THE LIVING EYE WAS PROFOUND INDEED.



TELL HIM, CRIPPS! HE'S YOUR BABY. MAKE HIM UNDERSTAND. NEITHER OF YOU NEED TO DIE. LONDON WOULD PREFER TO HAVE YOU ALIVE. SO WHY DON'T YOU TELL HIM, CRIPPS?

TELL HIM I MEAN NO HARM.



ANSWER ME, BALLARD. HOW DOES IT FEEL? IS IT GOOD?



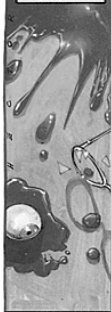
CRIPPS' HAND SPED TO SNATCH AT SUCKLING, WHETHER HE INTENDED SUICIDE OR ESCAPE, NOBODY WOULD EVER KNOW. THE TRIGGER FINGER TWITCHED, AND A BULLET SPREAD CRIPPS' DESPAIR ACROSS THE CEILING.



HAD HE BEEN MORE OF A MAN, BALLARD MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT TO MAKE SUCKLING SUFFER, BUT HE HAD NO SUCH PERVERSE AMBITION. HIS ONLY THOUGHT WAS TO RENDER THE ENEMY EX-TINCT AS EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE.



CRIPPS' GLASS EYE HAD ESCAPED DESTRUCTION. IT GAZED ON FIXEDLY, UNTOUCHED BY THE HOLOCAUST AROUND THEM.



IT WAS
DUSK.

HE DID NOT KNOW WHICH DISTRICT
OF BERLIN HE'D BEEN BROUGHT
TO, BUT HIS IMPULSES, FREED
OF REASON, LED HIM, VIA THE
BACK STREETS AND SHADOWS TO
A WASTELAND ON THE OUTSKIRTS
OF THE CITY, IN THE MIDDLE OF
WHICH STOOD A SOLITARY RUIN.

AS HE MADE
HIS WAY
ACROSS THE
WEB-
CLOSED
RUBBLE,
THE WIND
CHANGED
DIRECTION
BY A FEW
DEGREES
AND
CARRIED
THE SCENT
OF HIS
TRIBE
TO HIM.

THERE WERE MANY
THERE, TOGETHER IN
THE SHELTER OF
THE RUIN.

SOME
LEANE
THEIR
BACKS
AGAINST
THE WALL
AND
SHARED A
CIGARETTE;
SOME WERE
PERFECT
WOLVES AND
HAUNTED
THE
DARKNESS
LIKE
GHOSTS
WITH
GOLDEN
EYES; OTHERS
MIGHT HAVE
PASSED FOR
HUMAN
ENTIRELY,
BUT FOR
THEIR
TAILS.

BALLARD
LISTENED
AND HEARD
SOMEBODY
TALKING IN
THE CORNER
OF THE RUIN.

DO YOU
KNOW OF ONE
CALLED
MIRONENKO?

LISTEN.

